

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

SOME STYLISTIC FEATURES OF TWENTIETH CENTURY

AMERICAN POEMS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO

AMBIGUITY

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Preface

When I enrolled at the University of Edinburgh as a Ph D candidate, Mr. Norman Macleod, who had been the supervisor of my M Litt thesis, offered to supervise my Ph D thesis. Mr. Macleod's comments have always been helpful, and I feel deeply indebted to him for his stimulating discussion and assistance during every stage of my work and during the final revision..

Mr. Macleod suggested that Mr. Alex Rodger could be my second supervisor, and, indeed, Mr. Rodger's comments were superb. It was very, very sad that a fine and brilliant scholar, as Mr. Rodger was, had to leave us; and I wish to express my gratitude to him by dedicating this paper to his memory.

I also wish to express my thanks to Prof. A. McIntosh and to Prof. J.P.Thorne, who gave me the opportunity of carrying out this research.

This paper is made up of two distinct parts.

Part 1 provides a theoretical background to the linguistic and stylistic features that characterize poetry in general, and the American lyric poetry of the XXth century in particular. The notion of ambiguity is taken into account at various levels: in communication, in semantic interpretation, and in the cohesion of poetical texts. The role of the reader as a strategic character is discussed throughout Part 1.

In Part 2 the stylistic analysis of ten poems that can be defined ambiguous is carried out. The linguistic reality as well as the extra-linguistic reality of the poem have been taken into consideration, according to the following scheme:

Linguistic reality	Extra-linguistic reality
linguistic code (lexical, syntactic, semantic, phonetic)	real or pseudo-real situation (interpreted according to one's knowledge of the world)
structural relationships	structural relationships
formal relationships (in terms of categories, ideals, temporal levels, etc.)	between the elements of the artificial world of the poem (in terms of what might be possible, or could be possible, even if not verifiable)
referential associations (coreferentiality, presuppositions, symbolic associations, etc.)	inferences (deriving from background knowledge, conditions of probability, etc.)

The poems we have discussed are by E. Pound, R. Frost, W. Stevens, W.C. Williams, S. Plath, and R. Lowell, and they are all, to a certain extent, and according to their different modes of signifying, linguistic studies on the way in which a lyric text is composed and works; they are poems on the making of poems.

C O N T E N T S

Preface.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Contents.....	4
Part 1.....	6
Introduction.....	7
The Function of Communication.....	12
Communication in Poetry.....	18
The Reader and the Poem.....	29
The Reader and Ambiguity.....	35
What is Ambiguity?.....	39
# Effects of ambiguity: <u>nothing, still</u>	45
Communication and Ambiguity.....	47
# Ambiguity in phonetic structure.....	49
# Ambiguity in grapho-pictorial structure.....	50
# Ambiguity in lexematic structure.....	51
Ambiguity in Semantic Interpretation.....	54
# The notion of scope.....	58
# Functional structure.....	61
# Modal structure and the notion of scope in modal structure	66
# Coreferentiality.....	74
# Presupposition and scope and the notion of scope in presupposition.....	78
Thematization, Modality, Coreferentiality and Presupposition versus Cohesion.....	83
Part 2	91
An Immorality.....	92
The Freedom of the Moon	109

Acquainted with the Night	121
The Jungle	132
Proletarian Portrait	150
Contrary Theses (I)	159
A Clear Day and No Memory	169
Frog Autumn.....	185
Childless Woman	196
Water.....	206
Part 3	218
Intertextuality	219
Twentieth Century Poetry and Reader-Response	
Criticism.....	228
Metaphor and Meta-text.....	234
Conclusion	237
Notes: Part 1.....	241
Notes: Part 2	246
Notes: Part 3	248
Bibliography	249

Part 1

Introduction

In the introduction to the anthology Da Frost a Lowell [From Frost to Lowell] (1979), Professor Perosa suggests that the pattern of the American poetry of the XXth century, far from being reproduceable as a straightforward track, or as lines moving about in space without ever interlacing, corresponds to segments of lines taking different directions, interlacing, interlinking, entangling with each other, and suddenly ceasing to move forward, swaying loosely about. Let me quote a passage from one of his opening paragraphs:

La mappa, o se si preferisce il disegno, ha la struttura delle colonie coralline. Vi sono uno, due, più ceppi fondamentali da cui crescono e si sviluppano i rami, che a loro volta si aprono e si moltiplicano in continue derivazioni, deviano o proliferano in sorprendenti ricami e arabeschi. Fan sospettare una possibile configurazione unitaria; la verità è che rami, rametti e gemmazioni disegnano un loro geroglifico, ma continuamente lo variano e lo modificano. Si riconoscono parentele e filiazioni, non mai identità di disegno. Vi è una ragione unitaria di crescita, ma non di conformazione. Non abbiamo dinanzi un tronco vigoroso con le sue fronde e propaggini robuste, ma questa solida e al tempo stesso tutta rotta e segmentata colonia - o crescita - corallina. Qualcosa sostiene il tutto giù in fondo, ma troppo in fondo è impossibile spingersi. (*ibidem*:10)

[The map, or if you prefer the design, has the structure of coral colonies. There's one, two, more numerous fundamental roots, wherefrom branches originate and develop; branches which, in their turn, open and multiply in multiple offshoots, take different directions, or proliferate in wonderful lace forms and arabesques. You might suspect a possible unifying configuration; the truth is that branches, secondary branches, and their offshoots, describe their own hieroglyph, but continuously vary it and modify it. You can recognize relationship and progeny, never an identical design. There is one reason for their growth, but none for their configuration. We don't have before us a strong stem with its own fronds and healthy buds, but this solid and simultaneously broken and fragmented colony

or coral cluster. Something supports the whole, at the bottom, but it's impossible to go deeper.*]

Within this design characterizing fifty years of American poetry - the years that saw the affirmation of the USA as a world power and the traumatic effects of two world wars - the origin, the development and eventually the death of major poetical movements took place. The certainties and uncertainties, the affirmations and negations, the experiments and failures of the period, everything fits within this pattern. And the individual consciousness, of course, has a place in this design: the lyric poet's insights, whether creative or fallacious, are reflected in the branching outwards of the innumerable poetic efforts, the expression of the self being the lyric poet's commitment, and the making of a compressed, compact, self-reflexive poetic text the lyric poet's aim. The short, intensely constructed poem, in which the sense of rigour and restraint are among the imperative qualities of its pattern, develops and grows within the poet's private world, be it the world of his own self or a possible world that is a sign of the world of the self. Its origin may lie in the expression of poetic emotion to the accompaniment of the lyre, but this modern form makes nonsense of the lyric effusion, which is opposed to the quality of compression that it must possess in order to concentrate rich and heavy substance into a confined space, without exceeding the boundaries of its scope. A strictly structured composition, then; but just by virtue of this characteristic, it allows extensibility within the mind of the reader, who experiences its different levels in time. So, what^{is} maximum condensation of significant matter on one side becomes maximum decoding and maximum re-building on the other side. So, lyric poetry allows the greatest disparity in the ratio between the addresser's doing and the addressee's doing: on one hand, there is the poet's intense, personal emotion ('compact' and 'compressed' poetry) which disguises the logical relation existing between the subject matter of the poem and its mode of being constructed ('self-reflexive' poetry); on the other hand, there is maximum

* translation mine

a-temporal deconstruction on the part of the reader. This disparity is not a disparity of forces, but a disparity of out-flows; influx in the writing experience, efflux in the reading experience.

The question of the inherent characteristics of language, and that of the extensional power of poetry of creating and evoking the question of meanings and associations in the reader's mind, both take on a vital role in the voicing of the poet's thoughts and feelings, and in the expression of language, respectively. The apprehension of an image, a situation, a psychological state, or of various images, situations and psychological states as laid down in the poem are dealt with at the same time as the poetic discourse becomes a text. The reader, on his part, decodes the text to create his own apprehension of the poet's apprehension of the image, his own experience of the poet's experiencing of a situation or état-d'âme, in the sharing of the poet's experience with his own. But sometimes, parallel to the development of the discourse as discourse, the addressee realizes that the poem is also a discourse on discourse, a text on the making of texts, a meta-text. A meta-text, as well as dealing with the verbal message that an addresser sends to an addressee, deals critically with the nature, structure, and behaviour of texts, so that it is impossible to decide whether the poem is one thing or the other, or both simultaneously.

All this has to do with the notion of the ambiguity of a text. And the lyric poem, with its demands on the reader, constitutes the most appropriate medium for the reader to experience all its possible facets.

Before discussing the use of ambiguity in the grammatical and ungrammatical choices made in XXth century American lyric poetry, let me look at the theoretical principles governing the poetical expression as act of communication, the functional role of the ambiguous elements within the communicative act, and the interrelation of ambiguity with the linguistic levels of discourse, taking into consideration not only the structure of the language, but also the

effect^{has} the linguistic sign on the addressee, and also of all those elements that are physically not there, but can be inferred from the linguistic and extra-linguistic context.

After the theoretical premises and exemplifications, I will present the following poems as specimens of the ambiguous lyric poem of XXth century American literature, within the framework established in the preceding pages:

- 1912 "An Immorality"
(from Ripostes, by E. Pound)
- 1928 "Acquainted with the Night"
(from: West-Running Brook, by R. Frost)
- 1928 "The Freedom of the Moon"
(from: West-Running Brook, by R. Frost)
- 1934 "Proletarian Portrait"
(from: Collected Earlier Poems, by W.C. Williams)
- 1934 "The Jungle"
(from: Collected Earlier Poems, by W.C. Williams)
- 1942 "Contrary Theses (I)"
(from: Parts of a World, by W. Stevens)
- 1955 "A Clear Day and No Memories"
(from: Opus Posthumous, 1957, by W. Stevens)
- 1960 "Frog Autumn"
(from: The Colossus, by S. Plath)
- 1963 "Childless Woman"
(from: Winter Trees, 1971, by S. Plath)
- 1964 "Water"
(from: For the Union Dead, by R. Lowell)

These ten poems, though by no means constituting an exhaustive selection of fifty years of American lyric poetry, are representative of some of the main stylistic features of a

complexly and richly structured literary genre, and are
all affected by ambiguity.

The Function of Communication

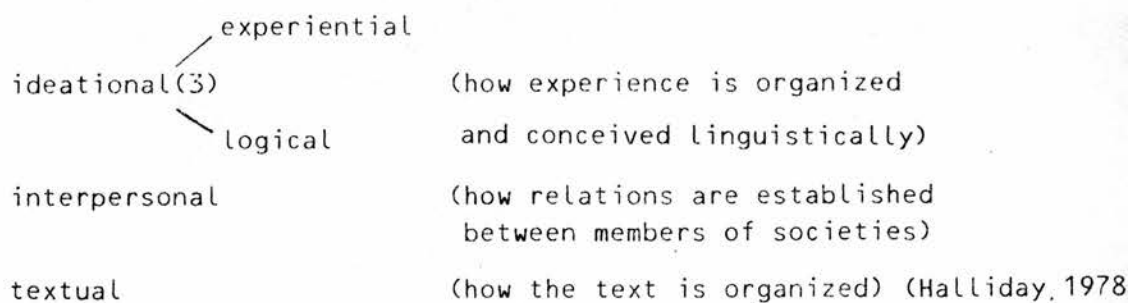
"The grammatical rules of a language are independent of any scale of values, logical, esthetic, ethical" (Hjemslev 1961:110). It certainly is arresting to realize that these words were not regarded as controversial twenty years ago, and that, indeed, by then they had probably lost the sense of unusualness, that they might have had earlier, or when they were just written by Hjemslev in 1943. Bolinger, who reports these words, is not unperturbed by the recency of the statement (Bolinger 1981: 154). Today, in fact, it can hardly be denied that "understanding language includes understanding the circumstances of its use" (*ibidem*: 154), and that there is inter-dependency between the linguistic matter and the extra-linguistic matter, up to the point that communication fails if an utterance does not *refer* to the situation. The language system is organized into different functional components; each linguistic element, in fact, has a function within the linguistic network of signs and meanings which is realized in the self-contained unit called 'sentence'. A discourse is made up of a number of sentences which are linked with each other to form a whole, and in which both the addresser and the addressee participate. Once a number of sentences become structured in such a way as to form a discourse, then a contextually determined function of the constituent utterances of the discourse is realized. The function of an utterance taken in isolation can be that of a request for information; but when this utterance is contextualized, it may assume a different value.(1)

There may be as many different uses of language as there are different situations in which a piece of language can be uttered: I find Bolinger's instance of communication failure - the woman going back to Vermont after many years in England asking a Vermonter "Can you tell me
and
to Vermont after many years in England asking a Vermonter "Can you tell me

where Church street is?", the response to this being "Yup" followed by his walking away (Bolinger, 1981:191) - both amusing and exasperating. That language be organized according to a system in which the structural relationships between its constituents form a cohesive and coherent whole does not make language communicative; its signs must be used by the producer to establish a relationship with the recipient, and by the recipient to enrich the message with his own personal experience. Quite how the personal experience may supply responsiveness to the message is a question involving the kind of act performed by the producer. The notion of exchange between participants and realization of the exchange is discussed by Sinclair and Coulthard who take an instance of language "Is someone laughing?" pronounced by a teacher in a classroom situation and argue that it is to be interpreted as a command to stop (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975:32). The pupils are aware that the action of laughing is proscribed at the time of utterance; their being aware constitutes their personal experience, which is inscribed in an extra-linguistic situation and belongs to a socio-cultural reality, and supplies the message with communicative content. These cultural codes must be shared by addresser and addressee, so that it becomes possible for the addressee to decode the message and assign it a value that becomes a part of his total experience. What is important in communication is not only 'what' is communicated, but the 'way in which' something is communicated and received, so that this act becomes a social act of common participation in a linguistic event, having as referent an extra-linguistic reality (2). In the same paper by Sinclair and Coulthard a situation is reported in which the interrogative utterance "What are you laughing at?" is interpreted functionally as a command to stop by the pupils, while it had been intended by the teacher as an actual elicitation. In a

Later paper Sinclair is preoccupied with the relationship between the form of an utterance, its possible functions, and the anticipation in the speaker's mind (Greenbaum 1981). The possible responses to "Where is my pipe?" in terms of apology ("Oh- sorry, I'll get it right away") and in terms of reprimand ("Down the side of the chair again, I should imagine") suggest that "there is a middle ground of mutual interpretation of utterances which is not necessarily dominated by the intentions of any participant and which is independent of what actually happens " (ibidem : 121, 122). In his paper Sinclair maintains that there is, in human verbal behaviour, a "purpose which is distinct from the content " (ibidem : 118), and that, in order to investigate this aspect of communication, one must necessarily keep under consideration areas of semiotics, such as "realization" (cfr. signalling among human beings), "content" (cfr. objective knowledge), and purpose (cfr. "plans, goals, intentions, motivations, aims, strategies, tactics, implications, presuppositions") (ibidem : 123).

The realization of the social system as a semiotic construct, where meanings are "integrated systems of meaning potential", has led Halliday to conceive of a text as three-dimensional:



The ideational component embodies the experiential/logical pair; in:

If he plants the seeds, the grass will grow

at the experiential level, there is a relationship

agent	process	affected participant
(he)	(plants)	(seeds)

in the if clause, and a relationship

affected participant	process
(grass)	(grow)

in the main clause. At the logical level, instead, the hypothesis can be formulated as:

If (clause) A \longrightarrow then (clause) B

The interpersonal component embodies aspects concerning the interaction or exchange of meanings, between participants. The textual component embodies the aspects of texture as relevant to the situation, for instance that the subject of the first clause is the pronoun he, referring to someone already identifiable in the situation or in the previous text. Halliday's system is a useful point of departure for the clarification of notions such as interaction, cohesion, coherence, text.

Interaction is one basic notion that characterizes the addresser/ addressee relationship. The addressee who receives a message must have a knowledge of the formal system of the language in question, that is of all the rules and structures that characterize the linguistic competence of a native speaker. By reference to this system of rules, the addressee can recognize the relationships of the parts to the whole, of the constituents to the text, that is, the way in which the message is cohesive. Cohesion determines the continuity of discourse, by means of cohesive devices, such as anaphora, deixis, substitution, which create links between utterances. But, beyond the set of relationships derivable from one's ability to use the language to construct a discourse, there are links in a discourse that provide its coherence, a concept beyond the notion of consistency (= non contradictory continuity) that refers to the set of relationships between the discourse

and the extra-linguistic reality. Coherence - or non-coherence - can be achieved because each utterance can be inscribed in a situation and function as speech act. The utterance quoted above, "Is someone laughing?", pronounced in a classroom, is an act of command, expressed in a situation, in certain circumstances. While cohesion is a feature of the structure (form) of the text, coherence is a feature of use, a use of language to perform acts of communication which cohere into discourse. Coherence does not depend on the linguistic environment, but on the conditions of significance holding between facts and some possible world or some possible topic of conversation. Let us look at the following exchange:

- A. The doorbell is ringing!
- B. The baby is crying.
- C. I'll get it.

Although there is no linguistic relationship between A's and B's utterances, the discourse is coherent, since B's utterance can be seen as a refusal to comply with the request made by A's first utterance, offering as excuse the fact that the baby needs attention. A, in whose world crying babies must be attended to, offers to perform the act he had originally asked B to perform. As matter of fact, on the basis of his knowledge of the world, the addressee can make a set of inferences to decode a message. The interaction between addresser and addressee takes place in the act of building up a linguistic structure to convey a message with a meaning performing a certain function (such as asking, promising, commanding, etc.) to an addressee, who, in turn, decodes the message, operates a selection according to the inferences he can make, rebuilds the discourse, enriching it with his personal experience, and finally responds to the message, by means of interactive acts, such as obeying, agreeing, reacting, and so on.

For a message to be interpreted by a recipient it must satisfy conditions of significance and conditions of truth. The addressee compares the values of the message with those of the actual world, but also with those of a possible world, thus placing himself in a pragmatic relationship with the message, matching the relationship between a standard use of the linguistic code and a cultural use of the utterance. An utterance need not be true with respect to the actual world; but it must be coherent within the pattern of the possible world (4).

On the basis of his identity as a social being, of his cultural codes, of his knowledge of the code itself, the addressee develops a number of expectations in relation to the discourse. The expectations can have a linguistic nature, in that he can foresee the linear development of the discourse by reference to what he knows of the structure of the language, making further choices on the basis of the information being transmitted to him. Other expectations can have a more specifically metalinguistic nature and derive from the knowledge of possible abstract schemes within which a discourse can be organized, (in the Hallidayean sense), such as the degree of formality of a text, or the degree of compression, which can, for instance, characterize a telegraphic message. Other expectations are built up upon the frame of reference that the addressee possesses within the cultural context in which the act of communication is taking place, and have, therefore, an extra-linguistic nature. Between the producer and the recipient, who share the common ground upon which the expectations of the latter depend, a sort of mutual adaptation takes place, which sometimes satisfies the addressee's expectations and sometimes contradicts them. The addresser, on his part, will have performed an act of communication only if the addressee's perspective has adjusted to focus it and has performed the right selections vis à vis his frame of reference. If these conditions are satisfied, then we can say that the act of communication has taken place as a social act in a culturally determined context.

The act of communication as defined above can also be performed through a literary text, with the same interaction taking place between writer and reader as happens in the relationship between the addresser and the addressee of an oral utterance (5). The organization of a literary text is rather more complex than the structuring of a conversation, because the latter is enriched by the responses of the addressee in its becoming, while the former is constructed by the same person who takes up the role of the addresser and the role of the addressee, alternately, to maintain the process of interaction. We can say that there may be different degrees of complexity in the organization of an utterance as discourse: from the simple act of establishing a contact between the worlds of two or more people by saying "Nice day, isn't it?" (phatic communion), to the organization of the transmission of an amount of information in a lecture, to the composition of a scientific treatise where each detail, however minor, is essential to the coherence of the whole, and finally to the structuring of a literary discourse, which, at its most literary, is a discourse about discourse, beyond being a discourse about itself (cf. p. 38, and note 15).

Let me take a poem by W.C. Williams as an instance of what I mean:

This is just to say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious

so sweet

and so cold

There might be a reader, with a full competence of the English language, who understands this message as the writer's request to the reader to overlook his having indulged in some sort of greediness. It might even be looked on as a note left on the kitchen table, had the writer not bothered to split up the linear succession into fragments of sentences: "This is just to say I have eaten the plums that were in the icebox and which you were probably saving for breakfast Forgive me they were delicious so sweet and so cold": a few punctuation marks could be added, but the meaning would hardly change. But this poem is not simply that. With this poem the writer "does" something, he moves all that is not part of the objective experience to the left of the page, but he also moves three pro-forms to the left of the page, one for each stanza: I (stanza 1), you (stanza 2), they (stanza 3), which receive emphasis by contrast. These pro-forms belong to the social system in which there is a relation between addresser (I) and addressee (you), and a reference to an object (they). Of the other elements, saving refers to a probable future subjective arrangement, and forgive to the performance of an act (that of asking forgiveness). The other lexical items belong almost exclusively to the abstract level of the linguistic system, in the sense that they have little meaning in themselves - the, that (restrictive pronoun), the, and, for, so, and -, so the meaningful lexical items become prominent. An overall pattern can already be established:

Stanza 1 The addresser (I) is introduced as theme.
 The object (plums) is introduced as part
 of the rheme.

Stanza 2 The object (which) is still dealt with,
but in a relative clause.

The addressee (you) is introduced,
though not directly.

Stanza 3 Interpersonal relationship between
addresser and addressee (Forgive me).
The object (they) is introduced as theme.

Other items are given emphasis by being in end-line position:
eaten, plums, in, icebox, which, probably, saving, breakfast,
me, delicious, sweet, cold. These are textual elements, and
are the elements that count in the direct presentation of the
experience. In stanza 1 the emphasis is on I as well as on
eaten, plums, in, icebox: a completed change-of-state transitive
process is presented (eaten / plums) as well as a characterization
of the object by location (in / icebox). In stanza 2 the emphasis
is on a characterization of the object achieved by a likely
circumstance of subjective arrangement (which/probably/saving/
breakfast), which brings in, though mildly, the notion of the
addressee. In stanza 3 the emphasis is on the request directly
addressed to "you" (Forgive me), and on the characterization
of the object by means of qualities graded from relative to
absolute: delicious ('delicious to me' - relative), sweet
('sweet to me' - relative - and/or 'inherently sweet' -absolute),
cold ('inherently cold', because just out of the fridge - absolute).
The pattern is now more complex:

Stanza 1 Statement of experience

(I = theme)

(eaten/plums = rheme)

(in/icebox = location)

Stanza 2 Non-realization of probable future experience

(which / plums / = part of rheme)

(you = part of rheme)

(saving for breakfast = circumstance)

Stanza 3 Request for forgiveness and offer of excuse

(/you/ vs. me = interpersonal)

(they /plums/ = theme)

(delicious, sweet, cold = rheme

(predicative characterization)

If one takes each stanza in its completeness, the logical level sticks out:

(Stanza 1)

(stanza 2)

(stanza 3)

Act
(doing
something)

as

going against
expectations
of 'you'

Act
(asking
forgiveness)
(offering
excuse)

C A U S E

C O N S E Q U E N C E

The poem is a discourse about the pattern 'incident', interpreted as 'breaking of laws', 'repentance', 'explanation' as apology; but it is also a discourse about the making of poetry: by emphasizing textual elements, the core of the experience is conveyed as pure images and pure perceptions, so that poetry is created. W.C. Williams has talked about the strategy of creating by creating.

Language is what this poem is about, and I would go as far as stating that all poetry is about language. Should one agree, in fact, that there is a system of signs, underlying poetry, patterning itself upon, and in relationship with, the abstract linguistic system, one could share the idea that the nature of the relationship between the poetic sign and the linguistic sign is a conditio sine qua non for the rise of poetry. Poetry says, first of all, something about that relationship, the semiotic relationship between itself and the linguistic code (7). Through writing the poet uses different strategies to anticipate the reader's expectations, objections, or questions, to contextualize his subject matter in such a way as to make it accessible to his reader, to realize meanings that provoke a pragmatic reading on the part of the addressee. He does so by attracting the reader's attention to the language itself, by foregrounding

the linguistic texture, by making the reader aware of the procedures whereby a literary piece is structured, by exploiting language to increase the linguistic awareness of the addressee, by referring his subject matter to cultural codes through the patterning of linguistic material in a way that can suggest them. In a literary text the relationship between the utterance and the formal elements, which makes up the 'co-text', is strictly linked with, and dependent upon, the relationship between the utterances and the situation in which they occur, which makes up the 'context': 'co-text' and 'context' are interdependent, in that linguistic devices characterizing the former, such as lexical occurrences paralleling syntactic structures, or modes of modifying enacted by lexical items, or clustering of images determined by the semantics of functional words, become real objects, pragmatic tools of a linguistic situation. In considering Katz's belief that a knowledge of another kind as opposed to the use of grammatical knowledge must be possessed by whoever is interpreting a semi-sentence in poetry (Katz 1964: 402),

Widdowson concludes:

I am suggesting that we interpret poetry in the same way as we interpret other kinds of discourse and that if we did not do so, there would be no way of explaining how poetry is interpreted at all. The difference between the interpretation of poetic and other kinds of discourse is not that we use different procedures, but that in the case of poetic discourse we are more conscious of them. Interpretation is more problematic and so we are inevitably more aware of the process involved. (Widdowson 1979: 158)

Undoubtedly, the procedures used to interpret literature are the same as those used to interpret any other text; what is different is the value that linguistic discoveries assume in the interpretation of a literary text. If we accept the definition of text as pattern of linguistic elements forming a discourse, used by a producer in a certain set of circumstances and made unique by references to worlds extraneous to the sign forms, we realize that there is a quality common to all literary texts, which is due to an additional interrelationship occurring

between all the factors constituting a discourse (lexico-syntactic components, semantic component, aims of the producer, relationship between producer and recipient). This additional interrelationship is established between these factors and the frame of reference of the linguistic system which is a part of the totality of experiences of the addressee, experiences that can be subjective and objective, abstract and practical, linguistic and extra-linguistic. When the addressee is confronted with a literary text, his linguistic frame of reference is not^{only} the abstract system of rules and categories, which forms the 'competence' of the speaker. The addressee refers to acts of 'parole', which belong to the subjective, personal, practical experience of the linguistic dimension; he refers to 'possible' linguistic worlds where language is used, including utterances lacking syntactic connexion, or common semantic content; he refers to the encyclopedic knowledge of the universe, where all preexistent literary forms exist as expressions of 'performance'. All this matter forms one's linguistic consciousness. How would his 'competence' help him, when everything in poetry is used with a particular purpose, including quotations, colloquialisms, idioms, bits of newspaper, and all deviating language? The addressee focuses on the stuff the poem is made of, paying attention to its language through linguistic awareness, and in the process acquiring the power of discerning what is ordinary and what is complex, while he recognizes that things that are profound and intricate deserve more attention than things that are only profound. The addressee's linguistic awareness is of capital importance in the reading process, because he is the one to judge what conventions of interpretation are ordinary (non-literary language), and what conventions of interpretation are specific and significant (literary language). For a text to be poetic, in fact, it must signal its own convention of interpretation: metaphorical language is not poetic just because it is a non-ordinary kind of language; metaphorical language is poetic when it has an

intrinsic semiotic organization (realization, content, purpose), which makes it suitable for playing a role within the discourse, at all levels.

Every act of communication occurs in a culturally determined context, within which all utterances are to be interpreted. In Lyons's words:

Context, it must be emphasized, is a theoretical construct, in the postulation of which the linguist abstracts from the actual situation and establishes as contextual all the factors which, by virtue of their influence upon the participants in the language-event, systematically determine the form, the appropriateness or the meaning of the utterances. It is important to stress the qualifying term 'systematically'. All random variation is to be discounted in terms of the distinction of competence and performance. The theoretical notion of the context-of-utterance is based of course upon a pre-theoretical notion of context (which is intuitive rather than observational) - a pre-theoretical notion to which we constantly appeal in the everyday use of language. Asked by a child or a foreigner what a particular word means, we are frequently unable to answer his question without first getting him to supply some information about the context in which he has encountered the word in question. We will also say, pre-theoretically, that a certain lexeme, expression or utterance is appropriate or inappropriate, or that it is more or less effective than another, in a certain context. (Lyons 1977:572)

The notion of context is basic to the functioning of every linguistic utterance, and, therefore, demands consideration. It is related to linguistic and non-linguistic forms surrounding the one which is being considered, and to the non-linguistic forms determining the situation in which the form being considered occurs. By supplying information that is given in the environment, and by indicating which the referents are for nouns, pronouns, deictic items, etc., context can carry the clues to the interpretation of a message.

In many cases involving ambiguity, context can disambiguate the message, by eliminating the probability of occurring of one or more potential meanings of an utterance, when taken in abstraction from context (8). Leech, in "Is Semantics a Science?", a chapter of his Semantics, dealing with the contextual aspect of linguistic utterances, represents the relative probabilities of the three meanings of three different occurrences of put ... on, according to whether the missing word be blanket, radio, lump of wood (Leech, 1974: 69-64). Let me reproduce the representation of Leech's estimate of the relative probabilities of the three meanings:

<div> <div>put X on</div> <div> <div>≡ (1)</div> <div>≡ (2)</div> <div>≡ (3)</div> </div> </div>		'switch X on'
		'put X on oneself'
		'put X on (something else)'

CONTEXT A	CONTEXT B	CONTEXT C
X = blanket	X = radio	X = lump of wood
<div> <div>(1)</div> <div>(2)</div> <div>(3)</div> </div>	<div> <div>(1)</div> <div>(2)</div> <div>(3)</div> </div>	<div> <div>(1)</div> <div>(2)</div> <div>(3)</div> </div>

(Leech ibidem: 79)

Each meaning here is referred to what Leech calls the 'background knowledge' of whoever is to interpret the message, as including anything we happen to know about the state of the universe at the time that the linguistic expression under consideration was uttered (ibidem: 88). And he continues:

For example, it is relevant to interpretation (1) of a sentence (2a) Shall I put the sweater on? to know whether anyone has yet invented a sweater warmed by electric current. (ibidem: 80)

But this competence including linguistic as well as extra-linguistic rules and categories is not accountable for outside the practical use that one makes of them. The role of intuition, then, must be recognized to account for this competence.

The concept of intuition is a landmark in Benedetto Croce's aesthetic appreciation; he says that pure intuition and lyric intuition are one and the same, in that pure intuition includes the ideas of non-conceptual and non-historic, and, therefore, it can't be but lyric. It is because they have a lyric intuition that simple and ordinary people, ignorant of history, have a superiority of intelligence over arid scholars who are, instead, completely dead to poetry (Croce 1980:196, 257). The idea of Beauty as an a-priori category is in keeping with the concept of intuition and is the basis of Croce's aesthetics: he explains that in the same way as the poetic expression is revived in the mind of its maker who has become a different person with the passing of time, it is revived in the mind of other people, and he adds:

La rievocazione [poetica] non può attuarsi che come ripercorrimiento del processo creativo di quell'espressione, ufficio che si suole assegnare al gusto. Ma poiché gusto e genio sono, come sappiamo, indivisibili, cioè non sono due ma un atto solo nel suo farsi che è un sentirsi e nel suo sentirsi che è un farsi, è da riportarsi più esattamente al genio-gusto, o, brevemente, al genio, che, come ha creato l'espressione, in perpetuo la ricrea. (*ibidem*: 61)

[The evocation [poetic evocation] can only occur with the recreation of the creative process of that poetic expression, a task which is usually assigned to aesthetic appreciation. But since aesthetic appreciation and genius are, as we know, inseparable, that is they are not two acts but one in its actualization, which is feeling, itself, and in its feeling, itself, which is an actualization, it is to be brought back more exactly to genius-appreciation, or, briefly, to genius, which, just as it has created that poetic expression, infinitely recreates it.*]

Explaining the difference between the concept of traditional aesthetics and of contemporary aesthetics, U.Eco remarks that:

L'esperienza estetica è fatta di atteggiamenti personali, di vicende del gusto, di avvicinarsi di stili e criteri formativi; analisi delle intenzioni, descrizione delle forme

* translation mine

a cui pongono capo sono allora la condizione essenziale per giungere a conclusioni generali che descrivono la possibilità di un'esperienza che non può essere definita normativamente. Un'estetica di questo tipo è quindi portata a descrivere processi formativi e processi interpretativi, le forme e le 'letture' che se ne possono dare, prima di aver detto qualcosa sul mondo come sfondo generale di questa attività. (Eco 1968: 23-24)

[the aesthetic experience is made up of personal attitudes, acts of taste, a procession of styles and formative criteria; an analysis of intentions and a description of forms in which they originate are, therefore, the ~~e~~ssential condition for reaching general conclusions which describe the possibility of an experience which can't be defined normatively. An aesthetics of this type, therefore, describes formative processes and interpretive processes, the forms and the 'readings' which could be ascribed to them, before making any statement about the world as general background to this activity.*]

An intuition supported by evidence, not uncontrolled intuition, then, is, in Eco's words, the contemporary requirement. But the evidence in a 'possible' world cannot be supplied in terms of what is true and what is false, because the rules that govern the 'real' world are not the same as those that govern the 'possible' world. So, intuitions of the contextual organization of a literary discourse (belonging to a 'possible' world) must be tested against conditions of validity of propositions organized in a different conceptual sphere. As far as the evidence is concerned, it can be supplied by the analysis of the features of language, by comparing the context in question with other possible contexts in which the item under attention may be used, by controlling contradictory statements, by controlling inconsistency within an organized system, by supporting one's thesis with a set of data based on the actual use a speaker makes of an utterance, by verifying that one's hypotheses at one level accord with what is codified at other levels, by using, in sum, all possible means to explore the conditions for appropriateness of an utterance in a context. But once intuitions have been tested and found acceptable and appropriate, one realizes

that they may not be intuitions, but rather, pragmatic responses to the text. The force of poetry resides in the text, and the addressee actualizes experiences in coming into contact with a text. It is the text, by unfolding itself, that functions in such a way as to elicit responses. So, in the process of reading a literary text, the reader makes hypotheses concerning the text, hypotheses that are intended to establish the nature of the coherence of the literary text; and it is the experience of whatever constitutes this coherence that is the ultimate act performed by the reader.⁽⁹⁾ So, in a stream of consciousness passage, coherence is established as a free association of ideas going on in someone's mind, and, with all its internal links and associations, becomes a linguistic experience for the reader. The work acts as stream of consciousness, the reader experiences it as stream of consciousness, by means of 'how' the language works and 'how' the reader perceives it, that is the interaction between the addresser and the addressee.

The Reader and... the Poem

Arguing for the activity of the reader within the text is going to be my next step. The belief that the reader has a role within the text should cause no amazement or bewilderment: the recognition of the dialectics text/reader as the essence of the literary phenomenon, in fact, finds widespread adherence. This idea is related to the fact that the reader's perception is in no one-to-one correlation with the 'objective' linguistic description. The automatic processing of a text, in fact, is, at times, interrupted, and a problem is formulated: in trying to solve the problem, the reader becomes a strategic character (10). Umberto Eco explains that, in the act of reading a literary text, the reader makes inductions (inferring general rules from particular cases), deductions (verifying if hypotheses at one level determine successive levels), abductions (testing new codes against possible interpretations), and in so doing, he proposes new codes which may make the text comprehensible (Eco 1975: 342). He describes the reader's experience in the following passage:

Il destinatario non sa quale fosse la regola del mittente e tenta di estrapolarla da dati sconnessi dell'esperienza estetica che sta facendo. Può credere di interpretare correttamente quello che l'autore voleva dire o può decidere di introdurre scientemente nuove possibilità interpretative. Ma, anche così facendo, non tradisce mai completamente le intenzioni dell'autore, e stabilisce una dialettica tra fedeltà e libertà. Da un lato è sfidato dall'ambiguità dell'oggetto, dall'altro è regolato dalla sua organizzazione contestuale. In questo movimento il destinatario elabora e irrobustisce due tipi di conoscenza, una circa le possibilità combinatorie dei codici a cui si riferisce, l'altra sulle circostanze e i codici di periodi artistici che ignorava. Così una definizione semiotica dell'opera d'arte spiega perché nel corso della comunicazione estetica abbia luogo una esperienza che non può essere né prevista né completamente determinata, e perché questa esperienza 'aperta' venga resa possibile da qualcosa che deve essere strutturato a ciascuno dei suoi livelli. (ibidem :343)

[The addressee doesn't know the addresser's rule and tries to extract it from the disconnected data of the aesthetic experience he's ^{involved}. He may think he's interpreting correctly what the author meant or he may decide to introduce, consciously, new interpretive possibilities. But, even so, he never completely ~~contradicts~~ the author's intentions, and establishes a dialectics between faithfulness and freedom. On one side he's challenged by the ambiguity of the object (discourse), on the other side he's controlled by its textual organization. In this process, the addressee elaborates and reinforces two types of knowledge, one about the combining possibilities of the codes to which^{he} refers, the other about the circumstances and codes of the artistic periods he ignored. Therefore, a semiotic definition of the work of art explains to us why, during the course of the aesthetic communication, an experience takes place, which can't be either foreseen or completely identified, and why this 'open' experience ^{is} made possible by something which must be structured at each level. *

The conception of the 'openness' of a text is applied to the use of a text as a mode of constructing a cooperation between different levels to get at an interpretation of the text, which is also a construction of a new discourse. The addresser, in constructing an 'open' text, adopts certain textual strategies whereby he can direct his reader, control his reader's actions, predict his reader's expectations, contradict them, create new codes of expression, so that his addressee can, in turn, indulge in a meta-reading of the text, by responding to it instead of being used by it, by approaching it in a variety of ways, to get at a free reading of the text, where each interpretation echoes and reinforces the others, according to the textual strategies operated by the addresser (Eco 1962).

It was in 1970 that Stanley Fish's conviction that the literary work consists of a series of speech acts that are performed at the moment in which it is being read, and that this becomes an experience for the reader himself, was manifested in an article published in New Literary History (11). He objects to Riffaterre's stylistic device as having to be unpredictable (12), since this would lead to the unacceptable assumption that if something is

ordinary, it is not doing anything . His position, on the contrary, is summarized in the following passage:

For me, a stylistic fact is a fact of response, and since my category of response includes everything, from the smallest and least spectacular to the largest and most disrupting of linguistic experiences, everything is a stylistic fact, and we might as well abandon the word since it carries with it so many binary hostages (style and -).

This of course commits me to a monistic theory of meaning; and it is usually objected to such theories that they give no scope to analysis. But my monism permits analysis, because it is a monism of effects, in which meaning is a (partial) product of the utterance-object, but not to be identified with it. In this theory the message the utterance carries - usually one pole of a binary relationship in which the other pole is style - is in its operation (which someone like Richards would deny) one more effect, one more drawer of response, one more constituent in the reading experience.

It is simply not the meaning. Nothing is. (Fish, 1970-71: 160)

An exemplification of the message of a poem as the effect it has on the reader, consists in the series of re-actions enacted by the reader as products of the actual impingement (as mode of creating the impact) of the poem on the addressee. Let us observe this point in the experiencing of Wallace Stevens' "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" :

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings,
None of them are strange
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.

There is a meaning - in the loosest sense of the word - in the poem, and this is the poet's disillusionment with the unimaginative night

attire of the community under consideration, and their unadventurous dreams, highly suited to spiritually limited people who retire at ten in their dull uniforms. But Fish wouldn't call this 'meaning' the message of the poem; the message resides in the effect created by, say, the sequence None... None... not... The negative operators act as elements leading to the extraction of the reader's response. Their scope extends along nine central lines of the poem, and this, in the reading experience, becomes a vivid picturing before one's eyes of the nonexistent colourful and pictorial clothing and the nonexistent exotic dreams. The reader, in receiving information on how the nightgowns do not look, and what those people's dreams are not about, builds up exactly the world that is negated, gives it an actual configuration, reinforced, in the final lines, by the existing wild dreams of the old sailor. The message of the poem, in terms of constituents of the reading experience, could be the strategy whereby the negated matter is presented so vividly that it is perceived as a set of referential qualities, rather than a set of negative qualities. The following example might cast some light on the question of unfulfilled expectation:

A. Who is Philip?

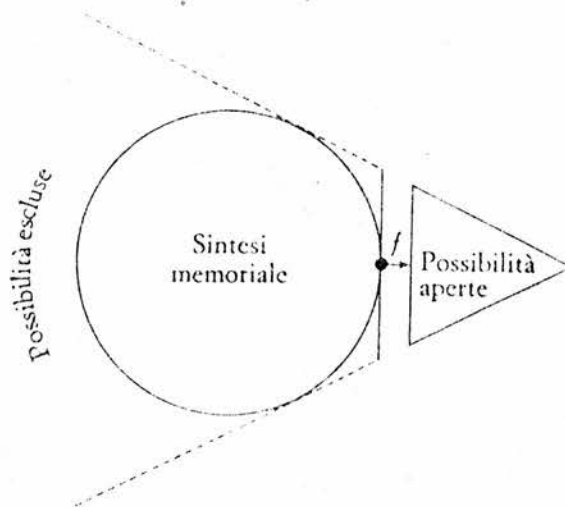
B. Do you know the red-haired, almost six-foot tall, youngish guy with a grin on his face, sitting beside Ann last night?

A. Yes.

B. Well, it's not him. Philip was sitting next to him, on the other side from A's expectations are contradicted, because one tends to be economic about the negated content of a discourse; or else - as happens here - one entity is defined in terms of a stronger, more vivid, more interesting, more picturesque entity in its environment. In the definition, one of them loses its space.

The reading process occurs in time, and time can be the temporal sequence of the discourse, identifiable with the reading time; the logical - and chronological - succession of speech events,

identifiable with the time of the poem; the moment of a cultural tradition, identifiable with the historical time, that is the point of arrival of a cultural tradition, and is projected towards a future time, when new cultural codes will be established. The literary text is produced at one moment, or better, period in time, and is susceptible of being interpreted in the context of the time to which it belongs; it is, of course, also projected towards the future, so that at any moment in ^{the} future it will be possible to interpret it. The time of the poem consists in the time reference of the poem itself, and is recoverable from features such as tense or aspect, or from the interrelationship of some of its linguistic elements. It can also be absent; and this would be significant for the development of the discourse as text. The reading time deserves more comment. In reanalyzing Baudelaire's "Les chats" to criticize the spatial structural analysis of Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss, Riffaterre notices that contrasting experiences function in such a way as to affect all the experiences already established in the reading process. When the reading experience has taken place, then the total of all data and knowledge of the ending surges back to modify what we perceived at the beginning (Riffaterre, 1966: 221). The temporal element inclusive of the sequence of speech acts and the reading experience of the addressee is what makes the difference between the linguistic description of a literary piece, and the way in which the literary piece acts on the reader. Cesare Segre draws a diagram which shows a moment in the reading process, when a part of the information is stored in his memory with the stylistic experience he has undergone, and other possible stylistic experiences and linguistic areas are ahead of him:



(Segre 1974: 16)

sintesi memoriale = memory synthesis

possibilità escluse = excluded possibilities

possibilità aperte = open possibilities

f (frase) = s (sentence)

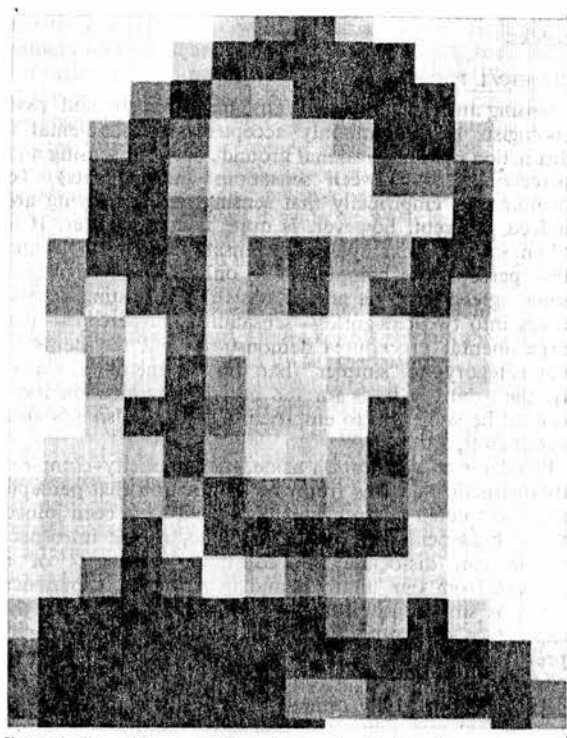
So, the semiotic experience of assigning meanings to signs, of creating new codes, of making inferences, of interpreting a meta-language, takes place in time; and it is because of this factor that expectations can be built up in the reader, and can be controlled by the strategy of the author. It is the author who gives indications about the possible semantic and semiological areas the reader will have to find out about in order to grasp the overall semantic universe of the work. The expectations the reader builds up imply that certain rules have been set up by the writer for the development of his discourse and these rules are the basis of the author's strategy.

The Reader and Ambiguity

When the author constructs his poem (= poetical message, literary text) he uses all the linguistic matter at his disposal, to create an entity within which paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships function to convey meanings, interacting with the thematic structure, creating images and associative suggestions, giving shape to a possible world, where a number of different meanings cluster to form the structure of the work. All this happens through the interaction between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic reality, on which the author draws to get at the final synthesis. During this process, the author enhances the expectations of the reader, which he can satisfy or disappoint, or manipulate in a sort of competition with him. The final synthesis of the author, who may or may not provide his text with a fabula, takes into account the dimension of the contingent reality. He may refer to literary or extra-literary conventions, insert himself in a tradition, intend to convey a definite meaning, achieve a meaning different from the one he had intended to achieve; the final synthesis is in the poem itself as self-interpreting act. What the poem does is manifest itself as discourse: it shows a way of giving shape to discourse. The vehicle is the linguistic stuff it is made of, a language which explains - or speaks of - language in linguistic terms. So doing, the poem creates.

The mimetic aspect of the literary phenomenon as a device to represent reality, and non-mimetic aspect as a distortion, alteration, of this literary representation, are both important for the experience the reader makes of the text. The reader, who approaches the poem, is a receptacle of thoughts and experiences, of sensations and perceptions, and it is on the basis of his knowledge of the world that he approaches the poem,

projecting his experience into the discourse, detecting the relations holding together the text, and discovering one or more level of meaning, that he enriches with his own cultural tradition (as a mode of being and thinking). In the flux of his perception, he builds up expectations that may or may not have been foreseen by the author, and may or may not correspond with the ones the author had devised. His expectations may be reinforced or weakened in the 'becoming' of the poem, i.e. in the process of reading. Within the text as product containing the information supplied by the author as well as the information supplied by the reader, ambiguity has a functional role, not only as a feature of the intrinsic meaning of the poem (and this is its less distinctive role), but also as a feature of the subjective meanings created by addresser and addressee. But the concept of ambiguity is more extensive, and ambiguity more powerful, than this, because it is the product of the cooperation between addresser and addressee. The addresser's production and the reader's perception are active processes: they amount to skills that the participants possess and that involve the construction of a message and its reception. The brain processes the message according to a hierarchical system enabling the reader to create selections and associations in his own mind, so that there is a certain amount of material that enters into perception depending on occasional circumstances, or on the situation, or on the cultural background and historical setting. In the processing of a visual stimulus, the brain reacts and develops a perception 'in time'. Look at the following design:



The apprehension of the design as the face of Abraham Lincoln is achieved more easily with increasing distance and in time (it also increases as the picture is located further away from one's eyes, it increases with anticipation being supplied, and on the basis of the personal cultural environment of the subject).

The design is ambiguous, inherently ambiguous (the face is there). In other cases the emerging pattern is not in the stimulus, but is permitted by the stimulus (as in the formation of specific shapes in the clouds): this time it is created by the perceiver himself. There is a difference in the way in which the two stimuli are ambiguous: in one case the perceiver is a recipient (having acquired the skill of perceiving sensations); in the other case the perceiver is a creator (having acquired the skill to create). If one applies this distinction to poetry, one realizes that in the reading process there may arise ambiguous patterns taking precedence over constituents and having properties

not inherent in the elements themselves, as well as intrinsically ambiguous constituents. Moreover, the same poem may be perceived differently according to the age in which one lives (historical conditions having changed from the time in which the poem had been produced); or it may have been intended with one purpose and ended up in acquiring a different, or even opposite function (13): all this depends on the extra-linguistic reality of the reader(s).

So, when a poem is ambiguous not only in its contextual features, but in the reader's perception, there will be two mutually exclusive possibilities *for the poem to mean*:

1. the poem as self-reflexive model, within which coherence rules can be established on the basis of thematic organization and of its interference with all the levels of structure, and can possibly be put against another set of coherence rules depending on contextually possible different - or additional - interpretations. This model poem is the mimesis of a speech-act, and also all the (in)finite possibilities of meanings one can provide evidence for (14).

2. the poem as textual strategy, on the basis of which the reader selects his material and establishes a code, based on the links between the poem as self-reflexive act, and the poem as self-interpreting act. A poem of this sort achieves maximum ambiguity, in that it can be read as text and as meta-text, as a self-reflexive meditation and as a strategy of creation (15).

What is Ambiguity?

The very essence of ambiguity consists in a plurality of meanings: these may be embodied in a single 'unit' which suggests them immediately; or they may be recoverable from a number of elements in the discourse; or they may actually be displayed, and produce one single resultant; or they may even produce a complex structure of meaning which is ambiguous itself. All these cases of ambiguity, and perhaps others which can be defined as intermediate cases, are made possible by the ambiguity inherent in the very nature of language. It is language which makes it possible, but it is also language which can elucidate it: as a matter of fact, only by taking into account other linguistic features and devices, can one find a resolution, or show how the equilibrium is maintained, or prove the complexity of the meanings involved. This aim is that of explaining language with language.

Ambiguity can be a violation of the rules of the linguistic code, which can be expressed at all the levels of language, phonological, lexical, syntactical, semantic. An example of this kind of ambiguity could be:

*This town is how
which in Cummings's poetry, becomes:

Anyone lived in a pretty how town

Cummings's line clearly violates the syntactic code, in that how is used as an adjective modifying a noun, a role which deviates from its normal grammatical function. However, one is certainly more prepared to make some sense of Cummings's line, than one is of a sentence like This town is how, which is ungrammatical. On the other hand, ambiguity often produces grammatical sentences, which can be interpreted in different ways:

She cleverly dropped her glass

one interpretation being 'she dropped her glass cleverly' having cleverlyⁱⁿ the function of verbal modifier, and the other being 'cleverly, she dropped the glass' having cleverlyⁱⁿ the function

of sentence comment. This sentence is, however, only ambiguous in writing, since intonation would disambiguate it in speech. Similarly, an ambiguity may be found in:

These books are read

These books are red

where it characterizes speech, but not writing; or it may characterize both speech and writing, as in:

All the bachelors came

having Bachelor either 'unmarried men' or 'people with a university degree' as referent .

In poetry one can have cases of ambiguity affecting a lexical item, a phrase, a sentence, or, more generally, a string of words. But such cases can be added together to provide the ambiguity of a whole poem. It becomes, therefore, difficult to define a 'unit' (= an element which is linguistically defined, and which can extend as far as the sentence), and specify its ambiguity; the theoretical unit will always have something to do with levels and categories which are only apparently extraneous to itself. It is necessary, when a case presents itself, to consider all the possible relevant aspects, even when this means relating certain constituents to others which may be physically distant, but logically close. Ambiguity is founded upon a relation which can be of two kinds: one taking place in time in its development as a sequence of instants (syntagmatic), the other taking place in time as the simultaneous existence of all its levels (paradigmatic). In the former kind of relation one can include all the cases involving a continuity, such as those determined by the extension of the scope of an element, or concerning the chain of the discourse, as in Cummings' poem 23 Finis, from which I quote:

May I behold my sunset
 Flooding
 over silent waters

Taken out of context flooding could be a postmodifier either of i or of sunset. Moreover, flooding could be a postmodifier of sunset either on its own or as part of the phrase flooding over silent waters. In the case of flooding being a postmodifier of i, over silent waters would be associated with behold or i behold. In the latter kind of relation (paradigmatic) one will, instead, include cases concerning an association, such as the last two lines of Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods":

And miles to go before I sleep

And miles to go before I sleep

where the clause introduced by before may function - as Prof. Thorne put it in one of his lectures (16) - on two different levels: as a clause of time, and as a clause of purpose.

These relations are often repeated at different levels in poetry, phonological, grammatical, lexical; and it is, generally, impossible to keep them distinct, or deal with them separately. They are, in fact, often in relationship with each other, and the total effect emerges only from a complete linguistic account of all the elements which play a role in the construction of ambiguity.

I said above that not only the addresser's production, but also the addressee's perception is an active process. But how is ambiguity perceived in the reading of poetry? The perceiver's activity is that of problem solving, since he has to find a pattern in something that does not seem to have a pattern. In cases of easily detectable ambiguity the pattern is extracted immediately - or better, almost immediately, since this process takes place in time, however short. A sentence like

The soldiers took the port at night

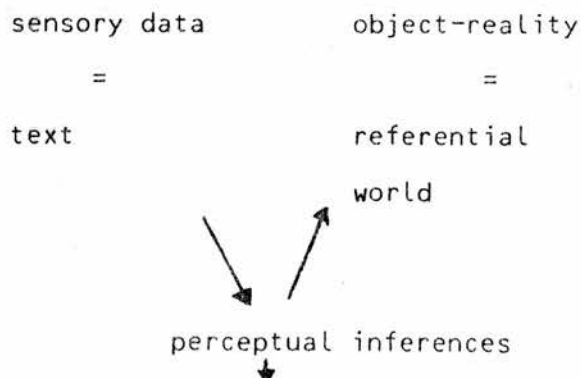
is recognized as an ambiguous sentence as soon as it is read, because it is familiar to people who read about language; but it has taken some time - however short - in the past, to detect the ambiguity in it. In cases in which the recognition of the object does not take place immediately, so that there is

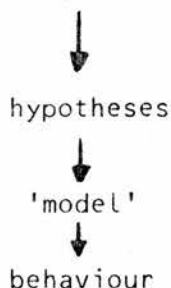
no active process between the incoming sensation and the different 'models' in the mind of the perceiver, there can be a delayed cognitive process, whereby an n number of sensations match an n number of 'models' or schemata. The immediate recognition of two different meanings is a "both ... and" relationship; the slower recognition of two different meanings is an "either ... or" relationship, which can be perceived as a "both ... and" relationship at successive readings. Often, perceptual complexity in reading is brought forth by ordinary language, so that the interplay text/reader is revealed. Kintgen (1979) supplies an example of the reactions of various students and scholars to W. Gibson's poem "Winter Piece", namely that many had difficulty in perceiving an easily describable linguistic construction, because of its length and internal complexity, which tend to overload the capacity of short term memory (*ibidem* :20). The process may become, of course, automatic at a second reading.

There are also texts where relationships between ambiguous elements remain "either ... or" relationships, because the text itself has an "either ... or" internal relationship. Before exemplifying this, I will quote a passage from Gregory:

Perception involves a kind of inference from sensory data to object-reality. Further, behaviour is not controlled directly by the data...So perception involves a kind of problem-solving - a kind of intelligence. (1970:30)

The scheme of how perception could work in reading an ambiguous text is, therefore:





For texts with "either ... or" relationships the active process of matching 'models' (or schemata) and perceptions is enacted as often as one reads the text, and every time there is a new "...or" perception, a new problem to solve. There are texts that reveal ambiguities at each successive reading.

I will now turn to the origin of ambiguity. It is often difficult to distinguish ambiguity from other characteristics, such as indistinctness, generality, vagueness, or indeed pure homonymy. When dealing with poetry, in any case, it is not the phenomenon itself that one wants to describe; it is rather the relevance that all linguistic phenomena assume within a certain structure that one wants to account for. To this purpose one tends to make a start from an ambiguous aspect of the language which appears in the foreground, rather than looking for possible or probable hidden polyvalence of meanings. The value of ambiguity in poetry is restricted to cases which matter, and some elasticity is needed in the evaluation and treatment of its meaning and of its quality: Empson, who has distinguished seven types (1930), often finds himself stating that an ambiguity he has discovered lies half-way between one type and another. There are also, as I have already pointed out, non-linguistic elements which contribute to create multifaceted statements: psychological factors, mental or intellectual states, emotions, and many more elements deriving from the intrinsic quality of human nature or from the experience of life. In Eco (1975:337) it is pointed out that the line by Gertrude Stein

a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose

is excessively grammatical and redundant. The rules of the abstract linguistic code are not violated, and the message is tautological. But it is this very excess of clarity that creates the ambiguity: the ambiguity of the kind deviating from the norm (redundancy, in this case), and the ambiguity of the kind producing different meanings (polyvalent information). It is this aspect of ambiguity which relates the linguistic point of view to the literary point of view: the excessive simplicity and reiteration in the language stimulates different kinds of responses, at different levels of human understanding. The purely linguistic interpretation must be enriched by aspects deriving from the whole spectrum of human knowledge, which can provide the natural symbolic associations. Therefore, the phenomenon of ambiguity can be accounted for from the syntactic-semantic viewpoint (including lexical and phonological ambiguities in this field), and from the pragmatic viewpoint: in the former case, it derives from the abstract use of the language; in the latter case, it derives from the use that is made of the language by the speakers.

Effects of ambiguity: nothing, still.

I have discussed ambiguity as a linguistic feature created by the poet for some poetic purpose, and ambiguity as a structural element in the overall pattern; of ambiguity in the poem, and of the poem defined as ambiguous; of easily detectable ambiguities, and ambiguity that it takes longer to perceive. Let me turn now to the effects of this phenomenon.

Two examples from T.S.Eliot's Waste_Land and one from a poem by J.C.Ransom will illustrate how the use of an ambiguous utterance harmonizes with the organization of the poem or with the organization of that particular section in the poem. The following are lines from The_Waste_Land:

Do

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
'Nothing'?

Here the meaning is complex, being made up of ambivalent questions: one can hardly know if an answer like 'I know nothing', or 'I see nothing', or 'I remember nothing' would be a satisfactory reply. As a matter of fact, is nothing a thing that one could remember, or is nothing simply the negation of 'something'? The ambiguity doesn't affect only this section; the word itself, in fact, constitutes the very essence of the poem, the 'wasteness' of the land. John Crowe Ransom, in "Mirage", exploits the ambiguity of 'nothing' to convey the mind's sensuous perception of an external object:

The sea mirrored
perfectly all the nothing in the sky.
We had to walk about to keep our eyes
from seeing nothing, and our hearts from stopping
at nothing.

In a straight forward colloquial situation, one might hear:

- the sea mirrored perfectly all the 'stars' in the sky
- we had to walk about to keep our eyes from seeing the 'water'
- and our hearts from stopping at 'the illusion'

The substitution of 'stars', 'water', 'illusion', with nothing in the mirage pattern, assigns to nothing the feature [+ real] for the first and the second context, and the feature [- real] for the third context. So, nothing, that is the absence of something, is transformed into something, that is an entity standing for the absence of nothing, namely an optical illusion, which is what the mirage is.

The second example from Eliot's poetry is a quotation from Four Quartets :

the light is still
At the still point of the turning world.

Here the meaning is complex, yet straightforward, in that the spatial and temporal components reinforce each other. The ambiguity resides in still, which conveys both the idea of 'stillness' (= that does not move in space), and that of 'duration' (= that lasts in time) ; from the tension between the two meanings the idea of the Chinese jar emerges.

Communication and Ambiguity

In terms of information theory, the process of communication can be seen as the transmission of a signal through a channel from a sender to a receiver, sender and receiver making reference to a common code. During the transmission, the signal may be affected by outside influences that can distort it or even change it. In linguistic terms, the addresser sends a message to the addressee through a medium; a message which is constructed on the basis of the linguistic competence shared by addresser and addressee, and which can be affected by 'entropy', a measure of the efficiency of the language system in transmitting information. In order for the signal to be understood, it must obey a law regulating its inner combinatory structure, to which a system of signification corresponds, which makes it possible for the addresser to 'mean' and for the addressee to 'interpret'. When the addressee has received the message, which is potentially ambiguous, but also redundant (in ordinary language it is usually half-redundant), he ~~re-uses~~ the code to decode it and produces a series of responses to it (feedback). He uses redundant elements to overcome external interferences. When the ambiguous message is conveyed, the addressee will try to disambiguate it on the basis of his knowledge of the world, which comprises contextual and situational aspects; on this basis he will make his selections. But it is also possible that the potential ambiguity of the message remains such, because it is not possible to select a part of the message and exclude a part of its signification. In this case the message cannot be disambiguated, and all the meanings coexist. 'Entropy' is due to elements which are extraneous to the potential signification of the message, although it interferes with the information, and distorts the communicative value of the signal. In linguistic communication, the message can be altered by the expectations of the receiver himself, who has probably been

directed to build up expectations by the producer; the receiver's expectations can then be exploited functionally, so that a calculated effect can be achieved. This has something in common with the device used in detective stories, of providing elements that make the reader work in the wrong direction and develop expectancies; meanwhile the author takes a different way and uses the reader's anticipation to get at an unexpected dénouement.

In the process of communication there is an interplay of structures that can be analysed by reference to the linguistic code in question, and extra-codified structures that can be analysed by reference to the real world. So, the receiver of a message naturally compares the values of the message with the values of the real world, in order to discover whether the message is true or false. But in considering the process of communication itself, one should postulate a reality which may be non-existent, but within which relationships must hold. The possible world is a referent for the real world, but it is not their relationship that is of interest for an analysis of communication; it is rather the semiotic function of the signal, and the conditions of significations it purports that matter, quite apart from the state of affairs in reality. In Theories of Literature in the XXth Century (Fokkema and Kunne-Ibsch:1977) we read:

The semiotician is not interested in the extensional meaning and is not prepared to investigate the truth or falsity of the propositions or texts he subjects to a semiotic analysis; and if he were to step into the shoes of the logician in order to distinguish truth from false, a fellow-semiotician might examine his judgement of the truth value of texts as part of a cultural code, i.e. just another semiotic system. (ibidem:x)

The possible world is the only possible referent for the poetic sign. (17).

Ambiguity in phonetic structure

This level concerns the perception and production of the sounds of speech. All the phonetic material that makes a poem a poem - metric artifices, such as the choice of phonemes, sound patterns, pauses, silences, line-endings, and all that concerns the sound in general - can function in a text according to standard rules or free forms; and the way in which these forms can be evaluated by the audience to establish acquired cultural codes, or create new ones, is necessary to acknowledge established conventions or, again, create new ones.

In a lyric poem conventions invest the formally linguistic field, the emotions of the author, and the responses of the receiver. Ambiguity can affect these conventions; but if it is free from content values and rests only on the sound texture, it is only an ornamental characteristic and has no practical purpose. If the descending staircase in W.C. Williams's three-part line (18), with its ambiguity of silence and sounds, of pauses and enjambements, were only treated as a variation in the phonetic structure and metric scheme it would amount to a mechanical device; but when the interpretation takes as its object the bundle of conventions, ideally, of all the known poetic matter, then there is ground for an aesthetic evaluation based on the manipulation of the level of expression. No set of data can establish a poetic value; but different sets of data must be confronted, compared, put against the background knowledge of the reader, in order to find out the relevance of the code to the specimen. The physical elements, considered in their duration, quality, internal diachronic and synchronic relationships, mathematical distribution and occurrence, are inserted in a temporal perspective, which takes into account the real time necessary to the receiver to examine the work, given his knowledge of the world. When a correlation is established between the physical

elements and the audience, an element x is said to acquire a semiotic function. This function can also be the product of a new correlation: in Eco's words a consistently interpreted ambiguous uncoded context gives rise, if accepted by a society, to a convention, and thus to a coding coupling (Eco 1976: 132).

When a semiotic function is established, a certain amount of information can be observed in the functional element: the greater the amount of information, the lesser the amount of expectedness. So, if by ambiguity we mean a variable with a certain degree of unexpectedness, it can be said to be directly proportional to information. Generally speaking, in a poem in conventional blank verse where the metrics is rigorously observed, very little information is conveyed - as far as the metrics is concerned - as one proceeds in reading; vice versa, if verse is free, every new line will contain a certain amount of information, which may decrease as the reader learns to master the non-conventional subcode to which the system refers, thus discovering a new convention within the text. But if the data cease to be mere given information, and become a tool for the reader's aesthetic experience, then their ambiguous function becomes inversely proportional to the amount of information conveyed. The translations of E. Pound are, for instance, an example of this: a convention totally new in respect of the original work is created and becomes a new convention; but the use of this new convention is ambiguous in that it serves the purpose of evoking for the reader, the atmosphere of the old world and that of the new one, tradition and modernity. So the established verse pattern (minimum information) becomes an instrument with infinite possibilities (maximum ambiguity).

Ambiguity in grapho-pictorial structure.

This level concerns the pattern of the poem as it appears on the written page. The visual distribution of stanzas, lines, letters, of the

in-between spaces, line-endings, italics, refrains, the punctuation, and so on, all these artifices do create an effect for the eye, in the same way as the phonetic artifices create an effect for the ear. It is important to distinguish the functionality of these elements from all that which acts only as an element of distraction and estrangement, without an aesthetically valid purpose. These elements constitute, in fact, the element of entropy in the conveyance of information, and can affect the message - and be, therefore, functional - only when they interfere to create new meanings (thus becoming ambiguous).

This level of poetry, pushed to the extreme (experiments in emblematic and figured verse), could be connected to the suggestions implied in the lettering of advertisements, book covers, titles on T.V. and the cinema, etc., and it constitutes a very wide semiotic phenomenon. But even in the aspects that are usually exploited in lyric poetry - that is, confined to relatively traditional devices - there is communication; and well-devised strategies are used by the writer to convey meaning, or better, meaningful matter.

Ambiguity in lexematic structure.

One can recognize, in a lyric text, a lexical area pertaining to the text, which may include expressions conventionally associated with the lyrical poetic jargon. Even in the dictionary, there are lexemes included in the category labelled 'poetical'. But the lexematic texture contains also function words, which have the nature of links in the discourse and constitute the vital elements of the linguistic communicative organization.

The so-called 'poetic' lexical items have their roots in history and tradition, and what was considered, for instance, "poetical" in the XVth century would not appear in today's lyric poetry, but rather in a different



genre, such as the satire and epic poetry. Within the same entry, therefore, one can choose - and the author has been able to choose - between the different items, restricting or stretching the semantic area of the same according to the function played in the poem.

The content words, together with the function words, can have a bi-topical nature, according to whether the topic is exclusive or alternative. A content word can 'mean' different things: a function word can refer - anaphorically, cataphorically, co-referentially, etc. - to different things. Their substructures can be logical or ideological, since the global interpretation is the fruit of a multilevelled cooperation. If a number of words are *equally probable* in a contextual reality, then that reality is ambiguous, and the alternatives depend not only on the reader's competence or cultural background, but on the text itself.

If, in Paterson (by W.C. Williams) the coreferential relationship established ^{poet} between Paterson, at the textual level, there is also - or there can be - a direct relationship involving man-poet-city, as if they were distinct and one and the same:

Paterson = the city = the male element = Dr. Williams =
the poet

Within the lexematic structure, one has also to pay attention to the distribution, which is a criterion according to which the function of a lexical item can become ambiguous, outside the limits of the semantic definition. As a matter of fact, in a poem like Williams's "The Red Wheel barrow"

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

a scene is created by selecting and arranging certain items of domestic origin, and by enriching them with meaning, not through the creation of polyvalences, but through the opposite technique: each individual lexical item keeps its original significance and a force arises from them in their concreteness that makes "so much" depend upon them. This is a good example of how a non-informative lexical item becomes subjective and ambiguous through the very force of its expectedness.

Ambiguity is demanded by the modern poet so that he be able to create, through form, the maximum number of sign functions. Eliot writes that the modern poet must be difficult, "in order to dislocate, if necessary, language, within its original meaning": he can do this using the rigorous forms of tradition, but for non-ordinary, unexpected purposes. So, what is non-informative at its most ordinary level may become informative - and ambiguous - when certain symbolical associations are established at the pragmatic level, on the basis of one's traditional, historical, cultural roots. The more the phonosymbolical associations the reader discovers to be appropriate, the more the ambiguities.

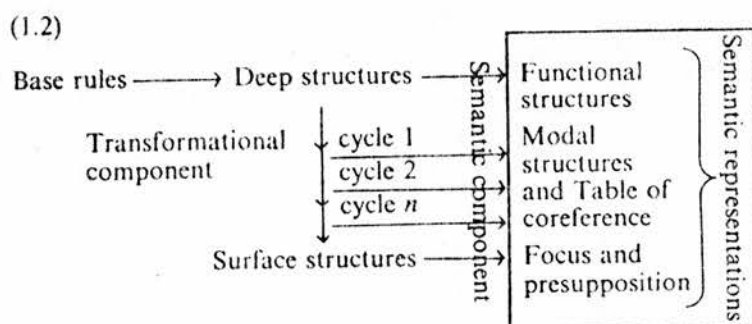
The opening of The Waste Land:

April is the cruellest month

reverses traditional concepts through the contrast with the spring rites of ancient mythology and through the echoing of the motif elaborated by Thomas Mann in Tonio Krüger - that spring, by arousing a crowd of sensations and instincts in one's head, disturbs and nullifies one's power of analysis, and forces one to take refuge on a neutral ground, the coffee house, which is not altered by the change of seasons. So, the opening line of The Waste Land brings about a series of paradigmatic associations that make the message ambiguous not in the statement, but in its function.

Ambiguity in Semantic Interpretation

It is very useful - for determining the semantic representation of an utterance - to refer to a grammar organized in such a way that the semantic component can affect various levels of the syntactic derivation: the level of deep structure would then be kept quite distinct from the level of semantic interpretation, and semantic notions could be accounted for without recurrence to the base rules. Jackendoff provides a diagram for such an organization of grammar, which accounts for the complexity of the semantic component:



(ibidem : 4)

and points out that, according to model (1.2), "we must retain the conception of deep structure as representing a level of syntactic generality, the conception that originally motivated its existence" (ibidem : 5). The notion of scope affects all the stages in the derivation, determining structural relations between the constituents, even those constituents making up a single lexical item. In a sentence like:

- a. The Government have sent them to Scotland for the next seven years .

the time adverbial is in the scope of only part of the semantic unit send (glossed, for example, as 'to order to go and reside/ work'), and this accounts for the ungrammaticality of a sentence like:

- b. *The Government have discussed the devolution issue until 1980.
whereas

- c. The Government have discussed the devolution issue for seven years .

and

d. The Government have sent them to Scotland until 1980.
are both well-formed. In fact, the future time adverbial until 1980 is incompatible with the present perfect tense of the verb discuss , but is not incompatible with the constituent of send which defines a stage subsequent to that of the constituent excluded from the scope of the time adverbial. But there are also other semantic relationships which underlie the surface representation, yet are not basic : they, in fact, derive from a level at which certain transformations have already applied. These are called modal relationships, and have to do with the way in which the functional relationships are established (19). In the following sentences:

- e. A girl will come .

- f. A girl may come .

there is a relationship between the NP and the verb which is constant; but the attitude of the speaker is variable. In sentence a, either a feature [+ future] or a feature [+ unrealized] can determine the modal relationship; in sentence b, either a feature [+ be allowed] or a feature [+ possible] can determine the modal relationship. The modal operators have the property of determining conditions for

identifying the referents of lexical items which fall within their scope. In one reading sentence a contains a non-specific NP, because it falls outside the scope of will; the feature [+unrealized], in fact, is related to the speaker's wish.

In :

g. A girl said that Mary will come

a girl is not ambiguous, and its identification does not depend on will: the reading of a girl is specific, and Mary is also specific (in fact, it is specific by definition, being a proper noun).

The notion of coreference also concerns a level in the derivation at which some transformations have already taken place. In:

h. John said that he would go

where John and he are coreferential, the rule of pronominalization has already applied when the two NPs are interpreted semantically as coreferential. Once again, Jackendoff's diagram ~~show~~ itself to be a good reflection of the mechanisms of semantic interpretation.

Finally, focus and presupposition are derived directly from surface structure and concern the information not shared by addresser and addressee, and, conversely, the information shared by addresser and addressee. In a context like:

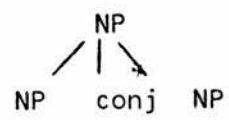
- i. General Elections will be held on May 23.
Which is the date for the European Elections?

it is clear that the focus would be on European, given the presupposition that two sets of elections will be held.

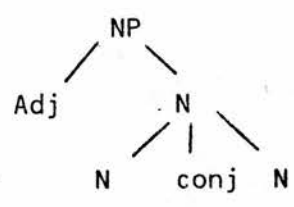
So, different syntactic levels can be interpreted by different semantic representations; and ambiguity, which can occur at all levels of the semantic component, also concerns the various syntactic levels, and not by any means exclusively the deep structure level. A classically ambiguous expression such as:

Old men and women

has two possible deep structures:



for: (old men) and (old women)



for: old (men and women)

but the multiple meanings of a sentence like:

j. You were hit by me

cannot be accounted for from its underlying representation, since they depend on phenomena involving the position of the information focus (given in capital letters):

- YOU were hit by me
- you WERE hit by me
- you were HIT by me
- you were hit BY me
- you were hit by ME

How ^{can} semantic notions disambiguate polyvalent utterances will be the topic of the next sections.

The notion of scope

This notion occupies a rather indefinite place in the realm of semantic interpretation; actually, it is not always clear how it should be accounted for linguistically, or whether it should be the domain of syntax or semantics, since it not only identifies the linear stretch of language over which an element operates, but also refers to the relationship between two or more elements (such as that between negation and quantifier), or even that between two or more components of the same lexical item (lend =(give permission)(to make use of)). However, it is inherent in the structure of language, and it is of primary importance in most cases in which ambiguity is produced. For this reason, it will be the first linguistic factor to be dealt with; considerably less will be left to say about ambiguity once this notion has been analyzed.

The linguistic material that an element commands can vary: the scope can, in fact, extend to the right or to the left, with no absolute restriction concerning the length of language over which it operates; moreover it may be restricted to material in the simple sentence in which it occurs, but it may also cross sentence-boundary:

He did not expect a young girl to ask for any cigar.
Here there are modal operators, such as the negation and the feature [- unrealized], whose scope may or may not include more than one syntactic category; moreover, one of the NPs may be either specific or non-specific. There are, in fact, various interpretations of this complex sentence:

scope of not : a. not expect a young girl

(but perhaps a young man)

b. not expect a young girl to ask for
any cigar

(but perhaps for a cigarette)

scope of expect : a. expect a young girl
(like the one I have in mind)

b. expect a young girl
(any girl at all)

scope of ask_for :

- a. ask for any cigar
(instead of a special type of cigar)
- b. ask for any cigar
(any cigar at all)

- b. ask for any cigar
(any cigar at all)

The scope of ask_for is complicated by the interference of the scope of the negation, which, as is clear from the example, may or may not extend into the embedded sentence.

Within the same simple sentence, certain relations which are determined by the scope of an element can be inferred from the linear order in which they appear. Such is the case with the scope of negation and quantifier in the following sentences:

a. Many people are not present .

b. There aren't many people present.

The scope is here determined by the position of the operators in surface structure. Often, though, the presence of elements, such as quantifiers, adverbials, indefinites, etc., does affect the structural relations holding between themselves: their respective scopes may then overlap, and ambiguous utterances may be produced. This can happen both in simple sentences and in complex sentences. Classical examples are:

c. The target wasn't hit by many arrows.

d. I will force you not to marry anyone.

e. He didn't marry her because she owned several oil wells.

f. He didn't marry her, because she owned several oil wells.

Intonation can disambiguate sentence a and sentence b in speech;
punctuation disambiguates sentence e and f in writing. Also, clause
sequence is reversible in f:

Because she owned several oil wells, he didn't marry her.

but is not reversible in e. In fact, the causative clause in e is in the scope of not; moving it to the left extracts it from the scope of not and makes it interpretable as sentence f.

Functional structure

The functional structure of a sentence refers to the relationships between its constituents, in their structure, and in the paradigm that they form. Semantics can be considered as affecting the structural relations holding between verbs and noun phrases, adjective phrases, prepositional phrases, and sentence complements, as the following sentences show:

- a. The door opened .
- b. John opened the door .

There is a relation in a and b between the NP door and the verb opened which is constant; but at a DS syntactic level the relationship between NP and verb in a is different from the relation between the NP door and the verb in b. Such relations have been handled in case grammar as case relations: John as the 'agentive', and the door as the 'objective' (20).

But also notions , such as thematization and information are relevant to functional structure. Thematization concerns the organization of the message in its sequence, and it is structured according to the two elements, 'theme' and 'rheme' (or 'non-theme'). Information structure depends on features of the phonological system, and on the way in which discourse is organized: a discourse, in fact, is made up of units of information, corresponding to one or more groups. In his paper "Theme and Information in the English Clause", an extract from a paper of 1967 (in Kress 1976 : 174-188), Halliday defines the terms 'given' and 'new' :

The terms 'given' and 'new' are to be interpreted, not as 'previously mentioned' and 'not previously mentioned', but as 'assigned, or not assigned, by the speaker, the status of being derivable from the preceding discourse'. Thus what is treated as new may be contrastive or contradictory. It is in this sense that the element to which information focus is assigned can be said to have value 'new' in the structure. Whether the remaining elements have the value 'given', however, depends on whether the focus is marked or unmarked. (*ibidem*:176)

Here is a discourse:

A. When will General Elections be held?

B. They will be held on May 23.

Which is the date for the European Elections?

A. I don't know.

In B's answer they represents the 'given' element, referring to the preceding discourse by means of an anaphoric link; on May 23 is the 'new' information supplied. B's question has a focus on European, since the presupposition is given that two sets of elections will be held. In A's answer I represents the relation of what is being said to the preceding discourse, based on the assumption that I was expected to know the date in question, whereas don't know is the 'new' element which establishes itself as a contrast to B's expectations. In terms of thematization, they is the theme of B's answer (it refers, anaphorically, to the topic of the discussion), and the date represents the 'rheme', or 'comment'.

Although thematization may be related to information structure - often the 'theme' (what is being talked about) corresponds to the 'given' of the utterance - it isn't always or necessarily the case that theme, topic and given, on the one hand match respectively rheme, comment, and new, on the other. In Cohesion in English Halliday and Hasan supply a number of examples of clause structure in terms of

theme and rheme, and, successively, in terms of new and given. In one of their examples the theme structure is represented in the following way:

John's aunt		left him this duckpress
Theme		Rheme

(Halliday and Hasan 1976:
325)

while the information structure - based on the intonation pattern - can be represented in various ways:

(the NEW element is printed in small capitals)

JOHN'S AUNT left him this duckpress

JOHN'S AUNT LEFT HIM THIS DUCKPRESS

JOHN'S AUNT left him THIS DUCKPRESS

(ibidem: 326)

which shows no direct matching of elements from the theme system and information system.

Within the realm of functional structure, adverbs must be taken into account and discussed. If one accepts Jakendoff's proposal that they are generated in their clause in the base (1972: 47-107), one can see that scope affects semantic interpretation at its deepest level. The simplest case is that of adverbs like merely

or simply, which cannot have a counterpart in their adjectival paraphrasis:

- n. Mary is merely a young girl .
- o. *It is mere that Mary is a young girl .

whereas

- p. Mary is certainly a young girl .
- q. It is certain that Mary is a young girl .

Also,

- r. Mary is a mere young girl .
- s.*Mary is a certain young girl .
(in the sense of 'certainly')

Such adverbs seem to be present in DS, rather than being derived from an adjective. Moreover, the scope of these adverbs is such that, the position remaining medial (otherwise called 'auxiliary position'), they can command the VP, or part of the VP (VP domination), or the whole sentence (S domination). This characteristic can, of course, yield ambiguity; and what is striking is that the semantics of the adverb cannot be accounted for in terms of its adjectival counterpart, so that the relationship adv/VP or adv/S could be translated into a relationship adj/N: the relationship must be understood at its deepest level.

Let me quote three lines from W.C.Williams's "The Desert Music":

Or

am I merely playing the poet? Do I merely invent
it out of whole cloth? I thought .

The first utterance can be understood in two different ways: either merely modifies the whole sentence (that is, it has the whole sentence in its scope), or it can modify part, or the whole, of the VP. The former version does not presuppose any sort of trick on the agent's part: it is simply a statement of an activity being carried out that everybody can see; the latter statement presupposes that there is somebody in disguise, trying to appear ^{to be} what, in reality, he is not.

There is a sense of guilt in the interpretation of the sentence with merely as VP modifier which is absent from the other interpretation. Similarly, in the next sentence, in one interpretation, the I invents without disguising that he does not know what poetry really is; in another reading, the I is a liar, one who makes things up. What is also interesting is that the poet has just given his reader a sample of lyric poetry with

Andromeda of those rocks
the virgin of her mind . those unearthly
greens and reds
in her mockery of virtue
she becomes unaccountably virtuous ;
though she in no
way pretends it .

The disjunctive or is also ambiguous, in that it could be considered as cohesive (and have in its scope only the material to its right) or as coordinate (and have in its scope the material to its left as well as the material to its right). The choice is, therefore, between that sort of poetry, and the fact that the poet is only pretending to be a poet. The following sentence comes naturally as the recognition - or better, the ironical/rhetorical question about the recognition - of being a liar : one who is using traditionally lyrical themes, but is unable to create. But elsewhere in the poem, he asks:

Why
does one want to write a poem?

and answers:

Because it's there to be written

The poet does not merely invent; or rather, he invents, but to recreate. Further on he exclaims:

I am a poet! I
am. I am. I am a poet, I reaffirmed, ashamed

He is not merely playing the poet; he is. By the time one comes to the end of the poem, the meaning has resolved itself.

Modal structure and the notion of scope in modal structure.

The concept of modality is essentially semantic, but it also has to do with the logical structures underlying the surface structures of linguistic expressions, and with the formal features of the language. The relationship of modality is based on categories occupying the extension between possibility and necessity, and between permission and obligation. Of course, there may be various degrees of uncertainty implied in an utterance, as there may be implications concerning different attitudes of the speaker versus his addressee. Various attempts have been made to classify the relationships of modality in English, and the most significant proposals have been taken into account and commented upon by F.R. Palmer in his book Modality and the English Modals (1979). He gives his own classification:

If we consider the event or propositions as a conceptual 'state of affairs', we begin with epistemic modality which merely states that such a state of affairs is possible or necessary. Dynamic modality suggests, however, that there are circumstances in the real world which make possible or necessary the coming into reality of this conceptual state of affairs. With neutral dynamic modality there are circumstances in general (and perhaps the term 'circumstantial' might be better than 'neutral' to indicate this), while with subject oriented modality they are the characteristics of the subject. Finally with deontic modality the speaker performatively creates the possibility or necessity for the coming into reality of the conceptual state of affairs. (*ibidem*:39)

Let us consider an utterance for each of the cases taken into account by Palmer in his analysis of the modals in English. For epistemic modality a sentence like:

a. She might go there tonight, but I'm not sure .

must be pronounced by a speaker who allows for the possibility which exists for the subject to go somewhere at a certain time. Epistemic modality, in fact, refers to the modes of knowledge, an area including something that 'may' be possible up until something that 'must' be or take place. A sentence like:

b. What you are saying may be true .

has a higher degree of uncertainty than:

c. What you are saying must be true.

In both cases there is an inference by the speaker, not verifiable in the light of knowledge; however, to add but I don't believe it would be natural in the case of the may sentence, but less in the case of the must sentence. The speaker is dubious, but in the latter case he is much closer to being convinced. Deontic modality involves a sentence like:

d. You really must go and see your father: he's so old!

where the speaker acts on the hearer, making him feel obliged to perform a certain action. Deontic modality refers to the modes of obligation, including also the area of permission. If we consider the following sentences:

e. Yes, you may go to the Opera tonight.

f. Yes, you must go to the Opera tonight.

a sense of moral obligation can be perceived, which determines the use of must, while sentence e can be interpreted either as a permission (the speaker plays the role of the person qualified to grant such permission), or as a probability (depending on somebody else's will to grant the permission, or on external circumstances). Dynamic modality concerns the modes of ability and disposition. The following sentences:

g. I can swim.

h. You can go everywhere with a student card.

show the distinction between what one is able to do, and what is possible for one to do (depending on external circumstances). The former instance of dynamic modality is the subject-oriented type, because it provides information about the subject; the latter kind of modality is the 'neutral' or 'circumstantial' kind, because the possibility or obligation depend on external circumstances.

Modality is expressed in English not only by means of a modal verb, but also through adverbs, such as possibly or probably, as well as

lexical verbs, such as be_able or have_got in some of their uses. These elements can function as modal operators; conversely, verbs that are formally modal verbs may, sometimes, not signal modality. Examples of 'semi-modals' are provided by should and would in their 'unreal' use. In the sentence:

i. I would come if I could.

the event is unreal: there is no modal relationship. In the sentence:

j. It is possible for Henry to come tonight.

there is a modal relationship, although there is no use of a modal verb. Sometimes the modal relationship depends on the speaker's attitude towards the event or state of affairs. In the sentence:

k. John wants to catch a fish.

the situation is ambiguous: there can either be a particular fish about which John is thinking, or there may be no particular fish, or even no fish at all that John can figure before his eyes. So, the condition under which this sentence corresponds to a situation in the real world is determined by either a specific or a non-specific reading of 'a_fish.' e

Through modality the speaker commits himself to a position, and this is relevant to the social role he performs in communicating; but he can also express conditions on the taking place of an event. The former attitude is called by Halliday modality; the latter modulation. This is how he expresses the distinction, within his own system:

Modality, then, is the speaker's assessment of probability and predicatability. It is external to the content, being a part of the attitude taken up by the speaker: his attitude, in this case, towards his own speech role as "declarer". It is thus clearly within the interpersonal component; but at the same time it is oriented towards the ideational, because it is an attitude towards the content that is being expressed. Modulation, on the other hand is part of the ideational content of the clause; it is a characterization of the relation of the participant to the process - his ability & c., to carry it out. But while reference to the ability does in fact characterize the participant in question - Smith_can_swim is a fact about Smith - reference to permission or compulsion does not. Jones_must_swim is not a characterization of Jones' participation in the process but of someone else's

judgement about Jones' participation; and that someone else is, typically, the speaker. (Kress, 1976: 211)

Whether the speaker participates in the speech event subjectively, or sends a message with an objective, referential function, both are a concern of whoever is involved in the act of communication. But the attitude of the receiver of the message towards the message itself is determined by the role that the speaker has intended to assume. And the more the role of the speaker is disguised by different relationships of modality, the more the receiver of the message will have trouble in trying to identify it. The connexions between the notions involved being so close, ambiguity can arise as to the attitude of the speaker. Is the utterance

l. John must be well-behaved.

an obligation on John's part, or is it an inference of the speaker, whereby he professes his belief in John's good behaviour? This is a question that Palmer would probably discuss in terms of possibility of proposition and possibility of event - and, therefore, under the general notion of possibility - rather than handle it in terms of modality and modulation as Halliday would do. Palmer, in fact, argues that, although a different degree of modal relationship is evident in two sentences like:

m. He may be working in his study.

n. He must be working in his study.

both sentences are negated with

o. He can't be working in his study. (Palmer, 1979 : 7)

Palmer quotes the above examples to show that a logical relationship involving negation - negation of modality expressed by may (possibility) and negation of the proposition with the modality expressed by must (necessity) - does, in fact, exist; but the limits between modalities are so fuzzy that it^{is} very often hardly possible to assign the modal a definite area in the classification.

Modality is representative also of the role that the speaker assigns to his addressee (what Halliday defines the 'interpersonal' function of language). In a sentence like:

p. You may go and play now.

uttered by the speaker/mother to the hearer/child, the modal relationship is one between the person having the faculty to grant the permission, and the person that the speaker believes to be the one who must follow the speaker's orders. Given an answer:

q. No, I won't go and play now.

the hearer asserts himself as rebel to the order assigned to him by the speaker, but does not deny the speaker's role. A reply like:

r. What are you talking about?

casts more doubts on the right, on the speaker's part, to play the role she's playing. Sentence p, moreover, is not exclusively a permission; it could also be, according to the situation, an obligation (uttered, for instance, when the speaker wants her interlocutor to leave her). The ambiguity here is not in the syntactic structure; it springs from the attitude of the speaker and the role the speaker assigns to her addressee. The choice of the speech role influences the speaker's selection of the modal relationship; often, the validity of what the speaker is saying is challenged by the style required by the social occasion. In the case of the p sentence used as a command to leave the room, it becomes the equivalent of an imperative:

s. Go and play now.

or:

t. You must go and play now.

In a sentence like:

u. John may come tomorrow.

the right of the speaker to be included in the statement must be accepted by the addressee, or, at least, recognizable - and maybe

refused by him. The inference of the speaker can only be taken as a possible interpretation of the sentence as displaying epistemic necessity, if there is some plausibility for him to affirm such a thing.

In order to disambiguate a sentence with a modal that can function in different ways, one needs not only to contextualize the utterance, but also to know what the position of the addressee is, and what the addressee thinks his position is. It is a question of the speaker's role, of the addressee's role, and of the social convention. Taking this last state of affairs into account, Palmer analyses the following three sentences:

You must have some of this cake.

You should have some of this cake.

You may have some of this cake. (ibidem:169)

He concludes that the offer that apparently imposes the greatest obligation (the one with must) is, in fact, the most polite one.

But, we do not need a linguistic explanation for this; the linguistic behaviour is of a pattern with non-linguistic behaviour and the problem is more a matter of sociology than linguistics (ibidem:170).

The relative extension of the scope - when a modal operator is involved - determines four basic types of relationships:

1. between an operator and an NP

(he wanted a piece of cake) (21)

2. between an operator and the material it commands to its left within the same simple sentence

(I may not bring the children with me, because they don't like to come)

3. between an operator and all or some of the material to its right within the same simple sentence

(he won't listen to me all the time)

4. between an operator and all or some of the material to its right, including one or more embedded sentences

(he wouldn't buy that car because it was large and economical. He bought it, because his wife liked it)

These types of relationships become gradually more complex as one proceeds from 1 to 4. With type 1 relationships, in fact, the ambiguity can be produced within the NP itself, and the scope is only relevant to its specificity; with type 2 and 3 relationships, it can arise according to the scope extending to the right or to the left, and according to the operator commanding all or part of the material to its right; with type 4 relationships the ambiguity determined by the scope extending from the main sentence into the embedded sentences complicates those arising within the embedded sentence, as in the following example:

v. She would complain that she couldn't go out all the time
This sentence could entail that:

1. she never went out
2. she went out, but not all the time
3. she used to complain all the time
4. she used to complain

In a poetic context, the ambiguity due to the extension of scope of a modal operator arises every time that ground exists for different ways of perceiving certain relationships. And more often than not, in a poetic text, all the existing features contribute to establish a pattern which is not rigid, but loose enough to allow different levels of perception. The following extract from T.S.Eliot's Four Quartets will give an idea about the power of stretching of the scope of the modal operators:

Not that only, but the co-existence,
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now.

Every single relation, here, can be understood as coordinate or conjunctive, since evidence would exist in the poem, with all its internal contradictions, for every possible kind of interpretation. And this is, in fact, a feature of the poem: antitheses, oppositions, ambiguities are produced on purpose: they are actually part of the structure itself. Every new operator can be retrospective (projected backwards onto the previous statement/s); every new operator also provides a shift from one statement to the next (projected onwards into the following statement/s). The fact there is no fixed limit to the extent of coordinate structures makes it impossible to draw a line between one coordination and the next. A pattern like:

(men and women) and (babies, boys and girls)
and (children, youngsters, adults, and old
people) etc. etc.

can be infinitely deep, and infinitely long: and this is what the Four Quartets are about.

Coreferentiality

This notion allows one to establish the links within a clause, or even beyond sentence boundaries: all cases in which an antecedent is in relationship with another element in general involve referentiality (e.g. pronominalization, reflexivization). An example is:

a. The boy came in. He sat down.

If the boy and he are taken to be coreferential, then the features of the boy and the features of he must not be contrasting; moreover, coreference can be established if he contains only the features of the boy and of his referent. If "he" has not the same referent as the boy, then they are not coreferential. The sentence is, in fact, ambiguous. Let us now consider the following sentence:

b. The boy came in and he sat down.

he sat down must be generated from a deep structure where he is the subject of the coordinate clause, so that it remains in the surface structure if it does not have the boy as its referent. But if it does have the boy as its referent - that is if they are coreferential - then there can be an optional deletion of the pronoun which gives, in surface structure:

c. The boy came in and sat down.

but the pronoun can also be maintained, allowing ambiguity to occur. Let us now reverse the sentence, which will read:

d. The boy sat down. He came in

For the boy and he to be coreferential the two actions, sitting down and coming in, must have occurred in that sequence, which is a very improbable sequence indeed. If the utterance was:

e. He sat down and came in.

there must be an odd situation in which the sequence does occur, since the he following and can only be deleted if it is coreferential with the he of he sat down.

Bolinger interprets it in this way: perhaps he decided to get into his wheelchair to propel himself into the room, in which case the sequence has been observed. (Bolinger 1981 : 10)

Jackendoff, in giving an interpretive theory of coreference, maintains that coreferentiality is a purely semantic concept and cannot be referred to in terms of transformation. So, he proposes to abandon Chomsky's 'indexes' (an index marked the relationship of coreference in DS, by being added to the items in question) on the ground that coreferentiality is a semantic concept, and proposes that such relationships be captured in a 'table of coreference', containing an entry for each pair of NPs in the sentence. In this way transformations would never refer to coreferential relationship, and all the rules dealing with them would not depend on how the rules are ordered: they can, in fact, as Jackendoff demonstrates, take place at the end of the cycle (Jackendoff 1972: 108-228, passim). With his approach, Jackendoff can deal also with cases of anaphora and cataphora, such as :

f. I wanted Charlie to help me, but the bastard wouldn't do it

g. Irving was besieged by a horde of bills and the poor guy couldn't pay them

(ibidem, 110)

which involve marking epithets as special lexical items which may functions as pronouns in certain contexts of the pronominalization rule, adding their lexical meaning to the intended attributes of the person they refer to (ibidem, 111).

The fact of pronouns enriching the semantic content of the nouns with which they corefer, is ~~expressed~~ clearly in Bolinger (1979):

The main error of formal treatments of "pronominalization" has been to regard the presence of a pronoun rather than a noun as due to a sort of mechanical process CAUSED by the presence of a noun at this or that location rather than as a pragmatic choice between a nominal with a richer semantic content and a nominal with a linear one. (ibidem:308)

There are also cases in which the speaker supplies an epithet that he thinks would be the opinion the referent has of him/herself at one particular moment. In Jackendoff's examples (f and g), the epithet is supplied by the speaker as his own opinion about the referent; but in the following utterance supplied by Bolinger:

h. He just wouldn't believe that Mussolini could be wrong.
(ibidem:307)

the epithet acts as a device to split the personality of the referent: it is il_duce looking at himself from outside. It becomes problematic to assert that he and Mussolini are, indeed, coreferential: they are, at a linguistic level, but they are not at a psychological level. Incidentally, I have used the epithet il_duce above, in order to attribute to the referent the opinion of himself as the infallible leader. The situation is that I am looking at Mussolini looking at himself.

Bolinger speaks of a sort of concealed quotation (ibidem:308) for certain cases of coreference between nouns and pronouns, including in his expression the speaker's intentions, viewpoint, or considerations. It is indisputable that, whenever something can be half-said, half-hidden, suggested, or implied, and can engage the reader in effortful attempts to reach transparency, the poet chooses to avail himself of the potential ambiguity to condense his material and make it pregnant. With coreferentiality he has a tool to utilize, a resort to exploit. I will quote the pub episode of The Waste Land, section II, to try to **assess** Eliot's use (or better, the addresser's use) of nouns and pronouns :

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said -
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart,
He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave
you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o'that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight
look.

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.

Others can pick and choose if you can't.

But if Albert makes off, it wan't be for lack of telling.

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been
the same.

You are a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,

What you get married for if you don't want children?

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot
gammon,

And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot-

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.

Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night,
good night.

In the setting up of the situation for the reader, Lil's husband is introduced neutrally as a stranger who is somehow related to a known referent. When the dialogue between the two women starts off, the man in question obviously becomes Albert, and is then pronominalized during the presentation of a possible future [- realized] situation, and of the past [+ realized] situation. The second time that Albert appears, premodified by poor, he enters the speaker's perspective, and a possibility of future betrayal [- realized] is reinforced by Lil herself, Then I'll know who to thank. Albert reappears a third time in the speaker's hypothetical - but [+ real] condition - utterance, which is a threat, and has, moreover, a potential cause in Lil's refusal to listen to May. Every time May mentions Albert, she tries to get him near herself, or away from his wife:

Albert's coming back (the direction is towards Lil, but
also towards May)

and think of poor Albert (he enters May's perspective)
 if Albert Makes off (off from Lil and -presumably-
 to May)

The next time Albert is mentioned (and there has been no pro-
 nominalization since the last threat), there is a new threat:
 the bugbear of more children to come. This acts as a revenge
 on the part of May, who contradicts herself; while she had
 lucidly analysed :(She's had five already, and nearly died of
young George), at this point she gets jealous, and angry: What
you get married for if you don't want children ? The contradiction
 is also in the use of Albert, when he's definitely far away from
 her and near his wife. But her madness vanishes in the lyric
 recollection: the beauty of the recollection is hidden behind
 the beauty of the hot gammon... The tone is sweet, Albert is near
 her, in her own recollection and perspective; and Ophelia's
 mad farewell comes at the end, to supply the graceful, contrasting
 comparison.

Presupposition and focus and the notion of scope in
 presupposition.

Presupposition and focus may be said to refer to 'given'
 and 'new' information, respectively. In a sentence like:

Was it the butler who murdered him?

the presupposition consists in a murder having taken place (= old information), and the focus is on the person who did it (= new information). Presupposition does not necessarily involve a statement which has been made, or which can be referred to the context; it can also involve information which is not present at all, either in surface or in deep structure, and is recoverable from the speaker's experience (the use of the past perfect, for instance, leads one to infer that an activity is continuing up to the present time, in most cases). There may be cases of presupposition concerning lexical items, phrases or even clause. If there is uncertainty about the presupposed element, ambiguity can arise; but the presupposed element needn't be present in the discourse in order for the presupposing element to refer back to it. In the following example:

u. You knew! I hadn't realized!

the question is whether the object of 'realize' is "that you knew" (= presupposed element present in the discourse), or else "that things were so" (presupposed element not present in the discourse, but inferred from it). Only the intonation could disambiguate the sentence, by assigning the main stress and highest pitch to the lexical item constituting the focus. In other cases, ambiguity arises as to which element - of the two both present in the discourse - is being presupposed:

v. You ^{knew} that he was guilty! I hadn't realized!

The object of 'realize' could be either "that you knew" or "that he was guilty". This shows that presupposition is often independent of the proximity of an element, or of the status of a clause (either the embedded, or the main clause may be referred back to, as in the above example), or of the presence or absence of an element; all this, in fact, multiplies the possibilities for ambiguity to occur. However, all such factors as intonation,

stress, punctuation, absence of punctuation can play a major role; and there may also be cases in which there is an interplay of some of these factors simultaneously.

The notion of presupposition often plays a role in the interpretation of an ambiguity originating from the extent of the scope of one or more elements. In the following sentences there are different presuppositions involved:

- w. The party wasn't enjoyed by all the people
- x. He doesn't listen to me all the time
- y. He may not come

(horizontal brackets indicate the extension of the scope)

In w, either 'the party was enjoyed', or 'the party was not enjoyed'; in x either 'he listens to me' or 'he does not listen to me'; in y either 'he is coming', or 'he is not coming'.

Since there must be a minimum shared experience between addresser and addressee in the speech-act (failing this, there would be no communication at all; the most extreme case being that of two people speaking two different languages, with no knowledge of each other's code), situations often occur, in which the presupposition is taken for granted, and the ambiguity is not produced. When this principle is applied to poetry, often, (but not always), paradoxically, the reverse is true: the more one is aware of the symbolical apparatus, or personal background, or historical connections, and so on, lying behind a poem, or a line, or a single word, the more one can multiply the interpretations and discover new information on that particular poem, line, or word. The presupposition taken from the real world, then, meets with that taken from the world of the poem, and the result can be corroboration of reality as one knows it, an adjustment of it, or a clash with it; in all cases, the truth of the poem is established.

An example from T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets may clarify this issue:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die.

Elements of verse structure must be taken into consideration in order to interpret the particular significance of only in each occurrence. These elements correspond to a series of features like pitch, height, and tempo in speech; or punctuation and conventional notation in writing, such as the following:

in speech: He didn't tell us the TRUTH

(capital letters indicate the nuclear stress)

in writing: I am not UNDERestimating him; I am
OVERestimating him.

But whereas marked features in speech and writing, by specifying the emphasis on, or the separation or inclusion of, different elements, usually contribute to the exclusion of certain interpretations, certain features of verse very often reinforce the ambiguity already existing. In the example taken from speech, in fact, the nuclear stress on TRUTH lets the noun fall within the scope of not (the sentence thus entails: he lied to us); in the example taken from writing, the emphasis assigned to the prefixes limits the scope of not to under, and predicts that the following clause will introduce a claim on the quality of the esteem, thus creating expectations and limiting the possibilities. This example taken from poetry has various elements which are involved in the ambivalent semantic interpretation. There is a pause in the middle of the second line which corresponds to a silent stress in speech, or to a caesura in the classical notation; the same is true of the following line, and of most lines in the first half of the fifth movement of "Burnt Norton". It is, in fact, a recurring feature of the poem; as can be noticed from an extended quotation:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can Only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say ~~that~~ the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. Words strain,

. . .

There is a parallelism between the three phrases only in time, only living, only die. The reiteration of the adverbial only provides a foreground for all the linguistic material in its scope: only implies that there is something exclusive about the material it commands, and therefore deserving special attention; what is in its scope, therefore, receives the focus of the proposition. But when one reaches not that only the scope of only extends to its left, rather than to its right; but that immediately preceding it, refers anaphorically to something that has been said before, but also to something said (or presumably thought of) by the addressee (A. This is my idea of marriage B. That is my idea too); so the scope of only can extend even into the domain of the reader's thoughts. In the next line, the predication 'say' comes out, included in a proposition somehow related (through or) with the preceding one/s, containing only nominals: the addressee is now overtly a participant in the poem. These, and other considerations concerning verse structure which derive from associations with other elements in the poem, increase the tension life/death in all directions, and force the extension of the scope of the last only to both directions.

Thematization, Modality, Coreferentiality,
and Presupposition versus Cohesion.

Cohesion is the result of the choice made by the addresser of the manner of linking sentences in a discourse. This notion combines elements from both linguistic and extra-linguistic levels or situations while shaping them into a composite whole, and, at the same time, identifying their referents. The result of the process of cohesion is a sense of semantic organicness. If there is to be any logical connectedness and interrelation of the linguistic elements at all, then there must be also a molecular structure where these links are primordially established. A very compact cohesive whole can be represented by the literature accompanying a mechanical device, or by a culinary recipe, or a dictionary definition: in all these cases cohesion is achieved through a substantial use of cohesive devices, and a good deal of presupposition concerning that particular area, while no room is left - or should be left - to ambiguity. The following is an example of definition, taken at random from A Glossary of Literary Terms (Abrams 1957, 1971):

FREE VERSE, or in the French term vers libre, is printed in short lines instead of with the continuity of prose, and it has a more controlled rhythm than ordinary prose; but it lacks the regular stress-pattern, organized into recurrent feet, of traditional versification. (*ibidem*:66,67)

The graphic devices employed in the reference to the item in question and in the references to the forms in relationship to which free verse is technically described, are a manner of keeping the whole text compact: each definition, in fact, would be printed in the same way throughout the glossary. Lexical items like prose and versification are given as reference to the presupposed knowledge of the reader in that field. Punctuation is both a reproduction device of intonation units in colloquial speech (where there is a pause in speech, there may occur a comma in writing), and a semantic addition to sentence structuring (the comma before and, for instance, acts on the conjunction

itself and determines its meaning). Syntactic cohesion is given by pronouns, determiners and conjunctions in the above passage; however, all the levels interact and contribute to the overall textual cohesion. If one focuses on:

with the continuity of prose, and it has a more controlled rhythm than ordinary prose; *(my italics)*

one can see that all three elements determine the semantics of the passage: and signals the continuity of discourse; the comma signals that the main characteristic of that property has already been given and what follows is either an addition or an altogether different point; the pronoun it introduces a new clause with distinct, though connected, information on the topic.

There are two main components in the organization of discourse: the logical development of the sentences in their linear order, and the systematic relations obtaining between composite sentences at the different levels of language, i.e. syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic structure. The sentence:

a. if you come, I'll give you the book

shows a logical coherence in its temporal development (my giving you the book will follow your coming, which represents the condition for my promise to be fulfilled), and also a relation between the different properties of language: this is a situation presenting a condition to be fulfilled, expressed as a real possibility with the present tense of the indicative mood, and the consequent realization of the promise - the action of giving the book - expressed as an action which is to take place in the future. With the sentence:

b. I'll give you the book, if you come

or

c. I'll give you the book if you come

a promise is made under a condition; but, although the truth conditions for the three sentences (a, b, and c) are the same,

the contexts to which they are appropriate are different. Sentence a is, in fact, appropriate to a context in which the hearer might know nothing about 'the book', or, at least, is not supposed by the speaker to have been thinking or talking about it lately (unless it is a calculated effect); sentences b and c are appropriate to a context in which the speaker and the hearer share a knowledge of the book in question (or they do in the speaker's opinion). The difference between the last two sentences is a semantic one: the comma, as tone-group boundary, signals a conditional offer, while zero-punctuation suggests pure eventuality. Punctuation also affects the modality of the sentences: in sentence a the condition for the taking place of the offer involves the intention of the addressee - and the speaker assumes the addressee has little intention of coming; sentence c, instead, cannot be reversed, because the if-clause is included in the scope of the modal verb, and the condition concerns the ability of the addressee to come, rather than his intentions (he may be willing to come, but be frustrated by factors outside his control). The modal relationship in sentence b is identical with the modal relationship in a.

The above examples show that the appropriateness of an utterance in a discourse, depends on the knowledge shared by the speaker and the hearer, and of the possibilities that they have of exploiting their respective beliefs. If, in fact, the speaker has reasons to believe that the hearer is particularly interested in possessing 'the book', he can reverse a sequence of sentences having as theme the promise of giving him it (because, it is presupposed, the book is of some interest to the hearer), and as focus the condition under which the promise would be fulfilled, and articulate his discourse with the condition as known element (not emphasized), and the promise as new element (with the main

accent on its nucleus). Pragmatic constraints, such as wishes, intentions, calculations, and assumptions, therefore, about the addressee's beliefs and biases, and not exclusively the requirements of syntax and semantics must be borne in mind when discussing the cohesion of a text.

Ambiguity is almost totally absent from contextualized utterances for the non-linguistic reason that addressees of such texts have a general knowledge of the topic under discussion. In a poetic text, instead, cohesive structure may be ambiguous, as in the following passage from Paterson:

A man like a city and a woman like a flower.
- who are in love. Two women. Three women.
Innumerable women, each like a flower.

But

only one man - like a city.

The language here establishes equivalences and conjunctions:

a man = a city
a woman = a flower
a man + a woman
each (woman) = a flower
one man = a city

The last equivalence is introduced by the contrastive but, therefore the statement is unexpected. In fact, a man has become one man (from indefinite to definite). The man is a man, any man, but also one man, the man the poem is about, Paterson. All men are encompassed in him, yet his identity is recognizable. Cohesion is also given by the successive numerals: two, three, innumerable, one. With one the reference becomes precise, while it was vague in the first line, where the indefinite article was used. Again, one throws ambiguity over the identity of the city: is it any city, or is it that very city (Paterson)?

The use of different cohesive devices can dissipate ambiguity:

- d. Mary went home. Mary did the washing up.
- e. Mary went home. She did the washing up.
- f. Mary went home and did the washing up.
- g. Mary went home, and she did the washing up.

In sentence d two separate actions are described, which may have been done by different people; in e she keeps the two actions separate, but defines the identity of the person doing the second action as coreferential with Mary; in f and conjoins the two sentences and relates the two actions to each other in a sort of temporal order and hierarchical priority; in g the temporal order is maintained and the hierarchical order eliminated. If the cohesion had been established lexically rather than grammatically, the disambiguation would have occurred with the same patterned succession:

h. Mary went home, and the poor girl had to
do all the washing up herself.

The semantic cohesion is there; yet in this last example evidence is shown of the speaker's evaluation or judgement.

But in poetry coreferentiality can multiply semantic relationships, as the following lines from Paterson show:

Let the snake wait under
his weed
and the writing
be of words, slow and quick, sharp
to strike, quiet to wait,
sleepless.

- through metaphor to reconcile
the people and the stones.
Compose. (No ideas
but in things) Invent!
Saxifrage is my flower that splits
the rocks.

The possessive adjective his coreferential with snake assigns to the animal a connotation of humanity or familiarity that a snake would not normally have. Particular emphasis is given to this unusual association when the following the is taken as being identifiable by reference to the previous context: in this case, it would be the snake which would bring the writing into existence. Alternatively the reference of the could be found in the act itself of composing the poem, and the writing would then be brought

into existence by an external source. And is also ambiguous, in that it could present the cojoined clause as a consequence of the former clause, or as a total shift in the occurrence of events. This ambiguous relationship between snake and writing is solved by the anaphoric/cataphoric lexical reference, metaphor. Anaphoric, because it refers back to the relationship or reconciliation between snake and the writing of words (the waiting snake, inside its skin, with the tail in its mouth, and the words with their far-extending power), which share the structuring potentiality; cataphoric, because it refers forward to the flower/rock relationship, recalling the idea of the structure and of the organic production of words (poetry):

snake	writing
rock	flower
(= structure)	(= words)

As far as presupposition is concerned, there may be ~~three~~ kinds:

1. when a 'real' referent may have to be presupposed if the utterance is to be categorized as 'true'. In this respect, the sentence

The present King of France is bald .

which is meaningful but has no referent, cannot be classified as acceptable, because the referent it presupposes does not exist;

2. when coreferential links may have to be presupposed in the context, if the text is to be found cohesive. In:

My friend came in and I gave her a gift,
for which she thanked me .

'her' and 'she' must be coreferential with 'my friend', and 'which' with 'gift';

3. when a knowledge of the world must be shared by addresser and addressee for them to detect the correct presuppositions. For a command , such as:

Will you bring me the letter, then?

to be carried out, there must be the condition that the addressee knows what letter the addressee is talking about. These last two types of presupposition are categorized by Eco as pragmatic; and the three of them as factual, that is, referring to a world that is not pre-codified, but that derives from the data supplied from experience (Eco, 1975:155). Edward Keenan has also distinguished between logical presupposition, defined in terms of truth-conditions, and pragmatic presupposition (in Fillmore and Langendoen, 1971: 45-54, passim). He maintains that one proposition *p* is said to presuppose another proposition *q*, if *q* is entailed by *p* and the negation of *p*. If *p* entails *q*, and $\neg p$ entails *q*, then *p* presupposes *q*. Presupposition is pragmatic, in that it commits the speaker to a belief in the truth of the proposition expressed: it depends on extra-linguistic reality.

Extra-linguistic information, whether 'real' or 'supposed', is massively important in literature. A known element, such as a cultural, traditional, universal experience or belief, can determine the 'givenness' of a statement, and also affect the textual cohesion, because it is treated as common knowledge shared by addresser and addressee against their given socio-cultural background. All the extra-linguistic factors having some bearing on the text provide 'old' information. This is reflected in the people's use of the definite article to refer to 'things' identifiable outside the linguistic environment: the sun, the moon - geographically -, the Queen, the Prime Minister - culturally -, the school, the park - locally -, the baby, the garden - domestically. In literature it is reflected in the addresser's use of unexpressed information recalled to the addressee's mind by means of a quotation. Pound's abrupt beginning of Canto I:

And then went down to the ship

introduces the theme of Ulysses, Homer's, Dante's, and all the 'variations' on it. If there is a set of alternatives - as far as the context-of-situation is concerned, which can be assigned to the way in which pragmatic factors are related, then one must investigate whether those pragmatic factors are indeed referred to the cultural background of a particular community. Something that sounds ambiguous might, in fact, not be for the addresser but might become so for the addressee. The problem is then an overall objective interpretation on one side, and a new, though personal and individual key-interpretation, on the other side.

Part 2

An Immorality

Sing we for love and idleness,
Naught else is worth the having;

Though I have been in many a land
There is naught else in living.

And I would rather have my sweet
Though rose-leaves die of grieving,

Than do high deeds in Hungary
To pass all men's believing.

Ezra Pound

This song belongs to the collection Ripostes published in 1912, and it has been chosen to stand at the threshold of this discussion as a poem which has developed in an ambiguous form, and which is the result of an ambiguous attitude on the part of the poet towards the literary tradition and the past in general, and, besides, towards its subject matter itself. The poet disguises himself behind a mask, or persona, to explore the links between the ancient world of the troubadours and the modern world. The element of the mask is itself a way of providing a double-sided personality, a man who investigates his own identity in his identification with a jongleur. But this is not the only ambiguous attitude revealed through the tension between author and text. There is also the transposition of ancient forms into modern though still traditional ones, and of documentary facts into contemporary reality.

This poem opens the selection of American poems of the first half of the century because it has a concrete link with a literary form in which allegory played a most important role: it was connected with the mythic structure of a society ^{-that of the Middle Ages-} that acquired its ethical principles through the parallels it found in Nature. So, the visual image was a symbol, a sign of nature for an object belonging to a different realm of human experience. As a formal element, allegory is present in literature; as a cultural element, it is present in life: thus, it becomes a link between literature and society. It awakens in the reader the recognition of a meaning lying beyond the extensional form (object or category), in the relationship between the

referent and its connotation, and in the way in which the reader handles it to satisfy his moral sense. In allegory agents, actions and the setting are contrived to make sense in themselves and to signify a second order of persons, states of affairs, events. This second meaning is contained in the author's abstract pattern^{of knowledge}. But allegory also demands action on the part of the reader, who not only has to discover themes and ideas hidden beneath the surface - thus treating words as references -, but also has to supply links between the possible world and another set of possible worlds - thus treating references as references. If he succeeds, then the use he makes of the allegorical entity or system leads him to a new discovery, which may be either an acknowledgement of the author's capacity to use allegory as means to a representation of an abstraction, or as an acknowledgement of his failure to do so, and his achievement of a mere allegorical dualism as an end in itself.

Pound, who revived the world of the troubadours by shaping his poem in the song form (measured by counting strong stresses, rather than arranging syllables into feet), and by asserting the belief in the courtly ideals of the Provençal world, made use of traditional medieval categories on which he brought to bear his experience as a man of the XXth century in such a way as to produce an ancient melody in a contemporary framework and arrangement. With this poem Pound bestowed upon language an allegorical function: the reader is encouraged to find the message not behind the myths - as was the case in medieval times - but behind the structural organization of the poem; besides, he is not taught how to find a code of behaviour, but how to respond to language, and, ultimately, to poetry. In wearing his mask

Pound heightens the responsiveness of the reader, because the reader himself must not only interpret the poem, but also interpret the persona disguising the author, unveil him, and recreate the poetic experience as an act of communication between the addresser and the addressee mediated by an actor.

The frame of references supplied by the familiarity with the tradition of Provençal poetry provides the extra-linguistic matter that the addressee needs to build up paradigmatic associations between the text and the world it evokes; the code used by the addresser which transposes themes and ideas of the past into a language which is basically modern English, and yet has an old-fashioned flavour, provides the linguistic texture, within which the reader finds conceptual relations between the elements of a chain; the rules of cohesion and those of coherence provide the metalinguistic system that the reader has to work out, in order to build up a new structure, consisting of the pattern of production, with the superadded pattern of the reader's personal experience.

The complexity of this lyric is not found in its versification, based on a pattern of three strong stresses per line that provide the rhythm of the song-poem, and on a regular rhyme pattern (AB CB DB EB). Nor is it found in the lexical substance, nearly all the words used being expected in a lyric of Romance influence, and also fairly common in the everyday usage of the English language. Nor is the grammatical structure a complex one, the use of the archaic "naught" and the form "sing we" being acceptable within a traditional poetic diction, in keeping with the archaic vein running through the poem. The complexity of this poem is due to its flexibility: in its conciseness and compactness of form it allows different readings for almost every line. Not only that; once the poetic text has extended into the

private world of the addressee, and the interaction between addresser and addressee has taken place, the use that the reader can make of the discourse may lead him to build up different systems, according to whether he considers the poem to be a product of today, or a product of the past; a "translation" (in Pound's terms), or an original piece - the work of a contemporary poet or the work of a troubadour.

The first line of the poem topicalizes 'sing', which is in accord with the extra-linguistic expectations of the addressee, who, in reading the poem from Ripostes, finds himself in the environment of the Middle Ages. Or the addressee is not aware of the general tone of the poem, so he is imparted a piece of information of what the poem is. The form 'sing we', surely an optative (in modern French "chantons nous"), has a speech act potential, which, in the course of the poem, will reveal itself as performed or non-performed. The poem can be considered the mimesis of an illocutionary act, if its thematic organization, as set against all the structural levels making up the coherence structure, does reveal that it is, in fact, the imitation of a wish. The lexical item 'sing' is semantically related to the actual performance of a musical piece, either to celebrate what exists or to urge something to become "actualized" (in reality or fiction):

- a. They sang of the Knights of the Round Table.
- b. While in prison, he sang for freedom.

But the prepositional phrase also plays a role in the conveyance of ambiguity. One can assign to for the ability to convey the idea of support for something which has not yet been achieved, as the following example shows:

- c. In spite of the measures taken against him, he went on composing songs for his utopian ideals.

But the prepositional complement can also function as the actual recipient, whether it be a noun referring to a [+animate] entity, as in:

d. He was very fond of his wife. He would often sing songs for her.

or to an abstract entity, as in:

e. He was very proud of having no ties whatsoever.

He would often sing for "Freedom and Anarchy".

This sentence shows that, in the private world of the agent, there exists a category - capitalized and in inverted commas - which is actually experienced as being true, and according to which he behaves. Had the sentence been:

f. He was very proud of having no ties whatsoever.

He would often sing for anarchy.

the prepositional phrase would have conveyed the idea of celebration of an ideal, the urge for the ideal to become true. This sentence, like sentences b and c, expresses a wish; sentences a, d, and e, instead, contain the presupposition that the celebration is of something one is already in possession of.

Turning to the poem, are 'love' and 'idleness' something the poet already possesses, or something he is pursuing? Here we must draw out elements from the 'possible world' according to which the reality of the poem is organized. So love is the counterpart of Amor and idleness the counterpart of Oiseuse (these being references of the Román de la Rose, but also common to much Provençal poetry). In the tradition of courtly love they constitute the utmost ideals of an aristocratic audience, for whom love is not love in terms of pleasure, and is opposed to all that in life means "being busy". So, if 'love' and 'idleness' have as referents Amor and Oiseuse,

they belong to a forma mentis that classifies them as cultural traits of a certain society, in a certain time, in a particular space, in their relations with other ideals, such as chivalry, war, honour, fealty, and so on. But if they belong to the XXth century reality, their relations are with totally different ideals, and the society in which they are inscribed has a different cultural dimension. Is this, then, an attempt to baffle the reader? No; it is a way of establishing pragmatic values, that are not rigid or restrictive, but that encourage the negotiation of meanings between the addresser and the addressee, so that the latter becomes, in turn, an actor in handling, dismantling, rebuilding the text in different shapes. The poem is, also, a self-interpreting act. This process is accompanied by the rhythmical cadences of the verse: the reader is, in fact, forced to pursue the flow of the song, and to read on until a variation occurs within the regular pattern, which displays a coincidence between line division and clause structure. In this way, each new couplet gives the reader the possibility to reconsider the relevance of the previous one(s), and to increase and extend his experience of the poem.

The second line provides the anaphoric link which combines the two sentences, and is a feature of the cohesion of the discourse. 'Naught else can be assigned a meaning in the communicative context only by reference to the preceding 'love and idleness. But ~~this~~ is not the only relationship between the first two lines. The second sentence establishes a relationship which is shared by the opening sentence, which we have considered. I am referring here to the quasi modality expressed by the prepositional phrase of the first line, and that expressed by the verbal nominal of the second line. The prepositional phrase expresses a possibility or non-possibility for "love and idleness" to exist; the verbal

nominal expresses a possibility or non-possibility for these abstract entities to be possessed. The semantics of "have" can have a feature [+ possessed], but also a feature [+ achieved], so in one reading we can have "they are worth possessing"; in another reading, "they are worth achieving".

The former refers to a condition, the latter to an act.

The manner in which the two propositions are organized superficially make different presuppositions available, so that the discourse may be coherent in two different ways, and the different ways in which we understand the verbal nominal account for the different conditions of the semantic structure of a discourse.

There is an additional issue strictly connected with the role of the preposition of the first line, and that is the function of "else". If there is to be coherence between the illocutionary functions shown by the a, d, e sentences, then "else" indicates an addition to whatever one is already in possession of, as illustrated in the following example:

g. I have got some material already. I don't want anything else (= in addition to this).

If the coherence established refers to the b, c, f sentences, what "else" does is stress the difference in the goal which is being aimed at, as the following example shows:

h. I am looking for some special material; I don't want anything else (= other than what I'm looking for).

In the following couplet, it is again "naught else" which provides the anaphoric link with love and idleness, establishing the cohesion, but it is the semantic possibilities displayed in the following ing form living that make the discourse a coherent whole. "Living" can refer both to the continuance of life, and to the business of being alive. If it is the duration of living, which is being

considered, as progressing from one moment in life onward,
then "else" expresses an addition:

- i. There is only one advantage, and nothing else,
in living, after what has happened to him
(= there is only one thing for him now and nothing
more).

If it is the a-temporal condition of existence, which is being
considered, then "else" indicates a difference:

- j. There are only sorrows, and nothing else, in
living (there is nothing different from sorrows,
no other things).

The extra-linguistic awareness of the medieval world,
establishes contextual references between the words of the
poem, and the parallel imagery dealt with allegorically in
the 'possible world' which has been established as given.
Couldn't the wanderings of the "I" in the poem be paralleled
by the journey undertaken by Man in the Middle Ages, searching
for an ideal of life and finding in his way all kinds of
dangers or distractions? Or by the journey of the courtly
lover in the Roman de la Rose, who, in his quest for love,
experiences all kinds of triumphs and setbacks? Or by the
journey of the knights looking for the holy Grail? The
frame of reference can be the Provençal world, but the attitude
remains ambiguous. Even the falling rhythm of the first two
couplets provides a regular metrical pattern typical of the
lyric, in its traditional loose meaning of songlike verse
form; but Pound's adaptation of traditional metres to
modern poetry is also an experiment to convey "anti-poetic"
themes, not the themes and functions that those traditional
metres used to convey in the past.

With the third couplet there is a rising rhythm which
can be perceived in the stress-pattern:

And I would rather have my sweet
and which indicates a sense of openness and inconclusiveness

typical of a precursory utterance. As a matter of fact the stress-pattern is in keeping with the semantics of the sentence, namely in the modal relations established by would.

"Would" followed by "rather" expresses a volition with preference, and has, therefore, a feature [+unrealized]; the lexical verb have, in the scope of the modal operator, is also "unrealized": hence the sense of precariousness of the statement. However, although [+unrealized], the act of volition may be either realizable or non-realizable in a future perspective. The quasi coordinators "rather ... than" express a differentiating correlative sequence, whose meanings depends on the occurrence, or non-occurrence, of what is expressed in the subordinate clause, which, in the poem, reads:

Than do high deeds in Hungary

If doing "high deeds in Hungary" is the act in which the speaker is indeed involved at the moment of the utterance, then the superordinate clause expresses a wish, which is not, at the moment, realizable; if, instead, the event is not taking place, but is rather considered as the ultimate possible alternative, then the preference expressed is presented as a choice, which rules out such a development of the situation, or is only an abstract speculation. The difference between the two possibilities can be illustrated by the following pairs of sentences:

k. A: Will you go by car or train?

B: I would rather go by car.

l. A: Will you go to Wendy's party?

B: Are you joking? I would rather die than see her again.

The preference expressed in sentence k has a considerable chance of being realized; but the preference expressed in sentence l hasn't, because the alternative expressed in the subordinate clause is so remote that the wish may as well be considered as remote as the eventuality of the fact to take place. The reference to Hungary, probably as a remote land where the medieval knights would perform heroic gestae far away from home, provides a terrain in which to locate the knight's regret at having been forced to bid farewell to his country and his beloved, and also a location against which to contrast the lover's rejoicing at being with his beloved in his own country. In this light the statement I would rather have my sweet can be assumed as a realizable choice and the poem be interpreted as a hymn to what the poet has been able to acquire, through the wanderings of his existence; or it can be accepted as an unrealizable choice and the poem be considered as a nostalgic song accounting for the present longings of the singer.

"Doing high deeds" also presents an alternative between two different presuppositions: "as I have done or am doing" and "as I couldn't, in fact, do or achieve". So, the poet may be ready to give up the ^hcompensation for the "high deeds", or he may be appalled at the idea of getting a compensation for doing the high deeds that he isn't ~~intrepid enough~~ to do. Is he a pure lover? Or is he a coward? The two possible interpretations meet in the ambiguous personality of the "troubadour", who resumes within himself the contraries contemplation / action. They are adventurous as well as cold admirers of Beauty, they roam from place to place fighting for their lord, and at the same time they are rigidly devoted to a fixed doctrine of love, a love that is

a convention, a ceremonial, not an act of possession.

The position of and is strategically significant: it separates the first two couplets from the second two couplets; it separates the two sentences making up the poem; it emphasizes the syntactic resonance between the two central couplets:

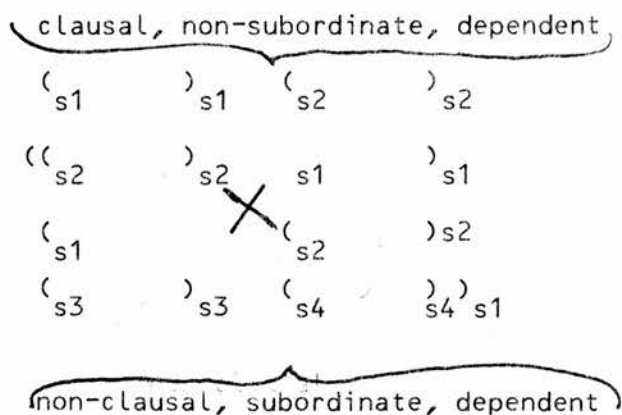
though clause

main clause

main clause

though clause

And is also identifiable with the ideal and physical conjoinment of the two wishes expressed in the poem (Sing we for love and idleness and I would rather have my sweet), hyperbolically intensified by means of an appositional clause - the first wish - and by means of two subordinate, dependent, clauses - the second wish -, so that the pattern looks like this:



where the similarity between the two central couplets is represented by a chiasmus-like pattern (formed by two pairs of clauses, parallel in syntax but reversed in their sequence); whereas the similarity between the edges of the poem is represented by the dependence of each pair of sentences on each other, though the first two are finite and non-subordinate, while the second two are non-finite and subordinate.

And also has a double function allowing two different interpretations of the poem. If we take it to be coordinate, then it must be projected backwards and create a correlation between the two sentences; if we take it to be cohesive, then it must express a shift in the discourse, by introducing a new perspective. According to the interpretation of and, the second sentence would either be logically related to the first sentence, so that the optative would be understood as the pursuit of what the title contemplates, or it would represent the shift from the exalted celebration of what the title conveys to the personal involvement. The resonance set up in syntactic terms provides a further contrast: the concessive clause of the second couplet, which precedes the main clause, provides a reinforcement of the fact expressed in the main clause, and the concessive-conditional clause of the third couplet, which follows the main clause, expresses only a parenthetical fact or possibility. And, with its position, brings together the reality of the existential there clause, and the will of the clause of volition, thus multiplying the ambiguity of their relationships.

Let us now consider the participial forms, which occur in the poem in different positions: prepositional complement position (three occurrences) and object complement position following the genitive case (last occurrence). Though having a nominal function, the -ing form retains its verbal force (or clausal nature), which involves an NP as subject in its deep structure. However, there is often a possibility for more than one NP to assume the role of subject. We will consider all the occurrences in detail.

The first -ing form, having, is preceded by the definite article, which puts the stress on the purpose behind the situation expressed by the phrase. Consider the following examples:

m Don't send gifts and donations. There's no point
in the giving of such things. The recipient would
simply ignore them.

n Don't send gifts and donations. There's no point

in giving.

While sentence n takes into consideration the process involved, sentence m accounts for the accomplished fact. In one case there is no hint of a purpose beyond, in the other case the emphasis inevitably falls on the definiteness of the verbal form, and, therefore, also on the possible implications involved. The use of the verbal nominal preceded by the definite article enlarges the semantic area of "have", including in it the idea of "possessing and keeping", beyond the basic "possessing" versus "achieving".

The subordinate clause introduced by though in the second couplet together with the main clause in which it is embedded, express a correlation between a concession and a result, and this relationship includes the nominal clause in the area of perception of I. The phrase in living could, in fact, be either a transformation of a sentence embedded in an NP and a reduction of "I live", followed by Equi NP deletion, or a reduction of "I live". The viewpoint is, however, strongly personal, because the nominal clause is a part of the discovery / result process experienced by the I. The couplet expresses a relationship of the following kind:

in spite of the fact that ("I have been in many a land")
the result is that ("there is naught else in living").

The following couplet, instead, expresses a different relationship, with an alternative choice:

the situation is that ("I would rather have my sweet")
in spite of the fact that
in spite of the possibility that > ("rose leaves die of grieving")

...

Here the sequence is that of a statement of fact and a concessive or conditional statement, which takes us back to the problem of the modal relationship expressed by would. The concessive statement entails: "rose-leaves are dying of grieving (because I do have my sweet)", the conditional statement entails: "rose-leaves would die

of grieving (if I had my sweet)". Within the concessive / conditional clause, the -ing form 'grieving' occurs, which is a source of ambiguity. It may be the source of grief which is topicalized, or it can be the experiencer of the grieving who is topicalized, as the following examples show:

o. His death grieved (= distressed) me.

p. I grieved for (= mourned) his death.

The phrase die of grieving could refer either to the immediate cause of grief, and it would be in keeping with the reading of the subordinate clause as a concessive statement, or it could refer to the feeling of sadness perceived by the rose-leaves, in which case the subordinate clause would be read as a conditional clause.

The last line has the function of increasing the ironical contrast between the celebration of love and idleness, and the heroic gestures performed in a certain part of the world, which go beyond human credulity. The choice of the speaker to give up an activity having such an impact on the entire human population acquires quite some weight. The importance of the choice is evinced in the reading of the last clause as a non-finite clause of purpose, rather than as a restrictive appositive postmodifying clause, because the I is foregrounded, and what is given up is the potential glory of the I. Let us compare the two possibilities:

high deeds ... to pass all men's believing

(which deeds can pass all men's believing)

high deeds ... to pass all men's believing

(in order for me to pass all men's believing)

And, indeed, the latter interpretation can be supported also on account of the line division, punctuation being absent. A pause after Hungary, corresponding to a comma in prose, would weaken the possibility for the subject of the last subordinate clause to be co-referential with high deeds, which lets the role of subject be assumed by I.

The language of this song can be described as concrete, since nearly every element has a role in conveying a definite mental image, or a definite emotion, as T.S.Eliot affirms in discussing the relation between poetry and music ¹. The musical effect accompanies the attitude of mind and contributes to clarify it. The phonological structure, based on the alternation of [+continuant] sounds (/s/, /z/, /v/, /l/, /r/, /h/, and /θ/), which can be prolonged without alteration of the quality of the sound, with [+nasal] sounds (/n/, and /ŋ/), creates a pattern of rhymes and internal assonances, which brings together equal surface forms with different semantic values. ² The stress pattern displays a variation, when a change in rhythm is required by the clause structure and a stylistic feature with semantic values.

Against the background of the dream-like atmosphere pervading the song, the state of mind of the self manifests itself, with all the contrasts, emotions, affections, humours that characterize the real person and the disguised person, in a continuous game between reality and fantasy. The reader, on the other hand, faces all this, but his process of apprehension is reversed - although parallel - in comparison with the process of "unveiling" of the author. While the poet disguises himself behind the mask of the troubadour and disguises the poem behind the mask of immorality, only to reveal, in the course of the poem, the authenticity of his material, the reader captures the authentic atmosphere of the medieval spirit immediately, only to find out that he is responding to a masked author and to a masked poem. The author goes from "masking" to "revealing"; the reader from the authentic perceiving of the world of the poem to the discovery of the masking of the poem, and the trial to which he has been submitted. The text encourages, by its very title, the reading of

it as an "immoral" statement: the invitation is a trial, a trial that manipulates the credulity of the naïf reader. But aren't these immoral statements rather responses to a specific life code, not at all immoral? The parallelism between the author's and the reader's process of revelation and insight takes place with a reversal in the order of events, which reflects the chiasmus-like central structure of the poem. The similarity in the process of "constructing" of the poem of author and reader, instead, reflects the similarity of the beginning and end of the poem, respectively. The author constructs, while he tries to deceive the reader; the reader constructs, while he tries to unmask the author. Both aim at building up, and, of course, they depend on each other.

The Freedom of the Moon

I've tried the new moon tilted in the air
Above a hazy tree-and-farmhouse cluster
As you might try a jewel in your hair.
I've tried it fine with little breadth of lustre,
Alone, or in one ornament combining
With one first-water star almost as shining.

I put it shining anywhere I please.
By walking slowly on some evening later,
I've pulled it from a crate of crooked trees
And brought it over glossy water, greater,
And dropped it in, and seen the image wallow,
The colour run, all sorts of wonder follow.

Robert Frost

This poem was published in 1928 in the collection West-Running Brook. It exemplifies the ambiguity of poetry, in that it has the poem itself as referent. The moon has its own intrinsic meaning, but it is also so wide as to allow meanings from outside to flow into itself. Its "freedom" is ambiguous; and the poem is ambiguous too, because it gives a reflection of itself and changes its shape in the light of the actions performed on it by the reader. We want to show how the reader acts on this particular poem, and how the reader's adventure becomes the topic of the poem.

The title of the poem consists of an NP followed by a prepositional postmodifier, the of-genitive. It is on the head noun, freedom, that the information focus falls, and it is this lexical item which establishes the constraints that may affect its environment. The genitive has two semantic possibilities here:

1. It could be subjective ("the moon is free")
2. It could be objective ("... makes the moon free to be used")

The meanings that these sentential analogues provide have to do with the origin of freedom : is it a permanent attribute of the moon, or is its freedom due to external influences, so that freedom would be something the moon can allow one to possess, but does not itself possess? Two examples can help us to illustrate this point:

- a. The freedom of cats can't be denied (= cats are free).
- b. John was given the freedom of the library (= John was free to use the library).

Sentence a refers to a quality attributed to, and possessed by, certain animals; sentence b refers to a state of affairs having validity at a set time. The subjective genitive indicates a relationship between the head noun and the noun of the prepositional phrase; but in the case of the objective genitive, such relation-

ship is absent. The noun of the of-phrase becomes an object in the sentential analogue (the freedom of the library = ... was free to use the library), and the head noun provides the predication, so that a relationship between them can only be external to the genitive phrase. In sentence b the relationship is between freedom and John, while in sentence a it is between freedom and cats, both belonging to the genitive phrase.

In the freedom of the moon the relationship can be between:

moon and freedom

moon and external entity

Beyond its permanent physical cosmic attributes, the moon also has traditional attributes ([+ feminine], [+ mutable], [+ beautiful]), all connected to its phases that make it look as if it was changing its shape all the time. It appears, increases, lessens, disappears only to the eyes of the observer; in actual facts, the moon does not change its shape. Can one say, then, that the moon gives the observer the freedom to build and destroy the moon, yet remaining unchanged? This ambiguity is inherent in the phrase the freedom of the moon, at least until a contextual reference is provided - in this case the reference is the whole poem - which can solve, or maintain, or enrich it.

The poem is characterized by postmodification in its various occurrences: with an ed-participial, ing-participial, or infinitive clause, or with an adjective. Postmodification, at its greatest degree of explicitness, however, is lacking. Finite clauses have, of course, the strongest specifying power; a power which decreases with the disappearance of the specific tense, or of the verb itself, or even with the choice of the preposition, as is clear from the following sequence:

- c. The barmaid who lives at the end of the street
- d. The barmaid living at the end of the street
- e. The barmaid at the end of the street
- f. The barmaid of the pub

One can see how explicitness is maximum in sentence c and minimum in sentence f; sentence f shows that the preposition of does not provide clarity, but is subject to different interpretations (like : "The barmaid we met at the pub", "The barmaid who was in the pub", "The barmaid who served at the counter in the pub", and so on).

There are in the poem cases of non-finite clauses as postmodifiers:

I've tried the new moon tilted (= when it was tilted)

[I've tried it] combining (= while it combined)

(There is a correspondence in the above postmodifying clauses with a non-restrictive temporal clause)

I put it <u>shining</u>	<	(= while it shines)
		- current attribute
		(= and it is shining)
		- resulting attribute

(There is a correspondence here either with a restrictive temporal clause, or with a non-restrictive coordinated clause)

I have seen the image wallow (= which was wallowing)

[I have seen] the color run (= which ran)

[I have seen] all sorts of wonder follow (= which followed)

(There is a correspondence in the above postmodifying clauses with a restricted relative clause)

We have also cases of adjectives with a predicative function as object complements as postmodifiers:

I've tried it fine - current attribute -

[I've tried it] alone - current attribute -

I've pulled it ...

and brought it greater - resulting attribute -

(The role of the object complement here is either that of current or of resulting attribute of the object; in the case of greater, this applies to one of its interpretations, namely "and it has become greater")

In the first stanza postmodification is non-restrictive, and the attributes of the object complements are current. The emphasis is on the head noun of the sentence, which is always moon. The second stanza opens with a more complex case of postmodification:

I put it shining anywhere I please
where the relationship of shining can be with it - and it is adjectival - or it can be with anywhere (I please) - and it is adverbial. In one case, shining specifies the result of the action expressed by the verb put, thus stressing the external influence exercised by the I on the moon. The absence of commas enclosing shining makes the ambiguity possible. The rest of the second stanza emphasizes the result achieved by the I, by acting upon the head noun moon, and the further effects obtained, which are indicated by the three final restrictive clauses.

There are also cases of premodification, namely of noun premodifiers (One of these can also be regarded as a postmodifier):

above a hazy tree-and-farmhouse cluster

(= a hazy cluster of tree(s) and farmhouse(s))

with little breadth of lustre (= lustre of little breadth)

(= little lustre in its breadth)

This phrase is, indeed, ambiguous, in that little can contain either breadth only, or the whole phrase breadth of lustre in its scope. The following two phrases :

g. A beautiful set of chairs

h. A colourful book of fairy tales

(= the book is full of ^{coloured} pictures)

(= the book is full of picturesque tales)

show that the adjective is not only an attribute of the noun immediately following it, but it can also premodify a whole phrase. This is also shown by sentence h, in one of its interpretations. All these phrases, together with :

with one first water star (= star of the first water) ,

are cases of multiple premodification, and they can be regarded as quite unorthodox and unconventional in their specifications: "a cluster of ..." would be more common, especially for a grouping of items which are not of the same kind, such as: "a flower cluster", "a cluster of flowers"; but: "a cluster of trees and bushes". The lustre is not usually measured in terms of its breadth, but rather of its brightness; first-water, used for precious stones, usually occurs as a postmodifier, as in: "a diamond of the first water". Each of these closely follows a case of postmodification, so that the structure results as:

head / postmodifier / premodifier / head

Premodification is not often interpreted as a specific identifier but rather as a means of letting an identification be taken for granted, and here it is used in such a way as to let its unconventionality be accepted as natural. Besides, it immediately follows a postmodification, which is quite specific, though non-restrictive: the total effect, in this first stanza, is one of contrast and balance.

The verb try is the only verb, in the first stanza, indicating an action performed by the I : try suggests that an experiment is going on, and the results have not yet been accomplished. In the second stanza, the verbs used in connection with I in the main

clause are put, pull, bring, drop, see. Four of these verbs express a momentary (pull, drop) or more lasting (pull, bring) action: they are all dynamic. The coordinator and, moreover, indicates a series of events arranged chronologically:

I've pulled it ... and then brought it... and
then dropped it ...

but the last and, preceded by a comma, indicates the result:

and dropped it in, and [as a result,] seen...

While the first series of and conveys the idea of a sequence of actions, each leading to a partial result, the last and expresses, in the coordinated sentence, the effect of the actions presented in the previous sentence. The difference is illustrated by the following examples:

- i. I took the child with me and gave her something to eat.
- j. I took the child with me, and she was happy.

Sentence i conveys the idea of time-sequence; sentence j the idea of result.

Let us now consider the double interpretation of the title in the light of the structural properties of the whole poem. The poem is divided into two parts, and the first line of the second sestet, in allowing two different readings which stress, respectively, the intrinsic quality of the moon and the ability of the I to act upon the moon, progressively adjusts the information-focus from one perspective to another. The linguistic features of the poem display a regularity in the first stanza which is different from the regularity of the second stanza, although there is a basic feature, that of postmodification, which is exploited in both of them. Its use is, however, different, and it is this use that can account for the ambivalence of the title. The subjective genitive interpretation seems to pertain to the first part of the poem, where the main quality of the moon is exhibited: all its modifications, suggesting its external

environment or the resemblance of its qualities to those of other objects (jewel, lustre, star) are non-restrictive, and, therefore, they are superimposed, and not inherent in the moon itself. In addition, the use of the nominal premodification, when the head is different from moon, reflects the urge to keep the style compact when the main object is not in the foreground. The objective genitive interpretation, on the contrary, is appropriate to the second stanza: here the adjectival modifications of moon are resulting, not current, attributes, and the cases of postmodifications restrictive. The subject of each clause being then invariably I, and I being the agent in each clause that has moon, or its pronoun, as subject, one can see that freedom here has resulted from the external influence, namely that of the I, who has thus become the principal actor and mover.

But there is another character who is involved, if only marginally at first, in the experience of the poet. This character is you, in "I've tried the new moon ... as you might try a jewel in your hair". The role of you might be that of the addressee, but the poet may also be talking to his own self, and emerge from his soliloquy to establish a comparison between his own experience and that of a generic you, who may not be present, and may not be the reader. The comparison involves the effects of light on the moon, against the background of the sky, and of light on a jewel, against the background of the hair. It also involves the function of such objects, that is the ability of the agent to use them freely as instruments.

I experiments with an object of nature; you has the possibility of experimenting with herself: one is a creator, the other a potential creator, with a potential ability of experimenting in the field of aesthetics. This relationship between the two can only be defined in hierarchical terms, since the comparison occurs between an active experiencer and a passive one. Moreover, the experience concerns an external object of nature in one case, and an external object related to the self in the other case. Again, one external object is capable of movement and is natural (=moon); the other is not capable of movement and is artificial (=jewel). This is the point of departure for a social relationship to develop between the two, and for one to act on the other, so that they can merge in the same experience. The power of I, in fact, develops according to the following pattern:

ll. 1-3 I (experimenter) as opposed to you (potential experimenter).

- Postmodifiers to the moon are opposed to premodifiers to object other than the moon: postmodifiers are temporal (the moon is seen in a definite time) and are strongly opposed to premodifiers which indicate permanent attributes.

ll. 4-6 I (experimenter) as acting upon the passive object moon.

- The moon here has qualities of its own (its attributes are current) is no longer placed in time, and is related to star, another natural object. This relationship, however, is ambiguous: is the lustre intense or feeble? If lustre is premodified by little breadth (and, by analogy with cases of premodification, it is not the lustre of the moon) then it is feeble; if it is little breadth which is postmodified by lustre (and, by analogy with cases of postmodification, it would be the lustre of the moon) then the lustre is intense.

ll. 7-9 I (actor) has an ambiguous function: either passive or active.

-It is not yet clear whether I has the power of making the moon shine (=poetic power?), or is only the passive actor who has no power of endowing things with a new quality. Pull, however, provides the link with the next section, being a verb which indicates a lasting action, usually done with a purpose. The sentence

? He happened to pull the rope
is not very likely to occur

ll.10-12 I (agent) is deleted.

The climax is in line 10:

And brought it over glossy water, greater
which has different interpretations:

1. and brought it (and it became greater) over glossy water
2. and brought it over glossy water (which then became greater)
3. and brought it over glossy water (which was a greater thing to do).

There is a direction, here, towards a greater power of the I: the moon may become greater of its own accord; the glossy water may become greater due to the moon shining; or to the I which makes it shine; or it can be the act of the I, which is a greater thing to do, a way of making the moon greater. At this point the I is the creator, who shapes nature according to his own will.

But I becomes most powerful when it is deleted, that is when it does not exist any longer at the grammatical level. Then, the strong power of I becomes the filter for the addressee's experiences (the addressee as reader, and the addressee as the you of the first line). This is shown by looking closely at the last two lines: drop and see can be either intentional, or accidental; the two following infinitive clauses convey objective experiences (in the water it looks as if the image was wallowing and the colour fading away); the last infinitive clause conveys a subjective experience, as filtered through the imagination of the poet or of whoever may be there: somebody must define the nature of the wonder for the wonder to exist.

In the final aesthetic arrangement the cooperation of all levels of performance will establish the freedom of the text, its intrinsic freedom to mean, the freedom of the cooperators to try new modes of significance, the freedom to allow ever new wonders .

If one assigns to the moon - according to the symbolical apparatus associated with the moon through the centuries - the metaphorical meaning of "imagination", one can interpret this poem as a composition on the way of composing poetry. Very simply, the poem becomes an excursus on the poet's first experiments with poetry as an act of aestheticism, which later acquires social connections, and finally becomes his own god. In a poet like Frost, who always disdained criticism on poetry, it is not surprising to find out how much he has been able to say on poetry through poetry itself. What changes in the poem is the position

of the you in respect of the I: after all the time and strength spent by the I, what is attained is a subjective experience, which remains half-way between the act of the will, and the act of the subconscious mind. What is new, - in respect of the traditional accounts of the moon's influence - is that the moon no longer acts upon the mortal creatures determining their fate, but can only act insofar as the poet, by acting upon it, has enabled it to do so; the poet himself is, in the end, its victim.

Acquainted With the Night

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain - and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat.
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say goodbye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock, against the sky
Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

Robert Frost

This poem ^{also} belongs to the collection of 1928. The title of the poem consists of a ^{reduced} ed-participial clause, which, in the poem, becomes a sentence embedded in a sentence with the main verb in the present perfect tense. This sentence takes up the whole of the first and of the last line, which are, in fact, identical. Whether they are identical only in form, or in form and content can only emerge from the analysis of what comes in between the two lines; more precisely, the analysis can show whether the last line is a mere repetition of the first, or acquires a different meaning. The last line also rhymes with the line immediately preceding it, thus providing a closure to the poem which, because of the metrical change, receives emphasis. G.N. Leech points out what the effects of this linguistic resource can be (Leech 1969):

By underlining rather than elaborating the message, it / repetition / presents a simple emotion with force. It may further suggest a suppressed intensity of feeling - an imprisoned feeling, as it were, for which there is no outlet but a repeated hammering at the confining walls of language. In a way, saying the same thing over is a reflection of the inadequacy of language to express what you have to express 'in one go' (p. 19)

Rhyme has been organized, in this poem, according to a scheme of enchainment of section with section: the first and last line of each tercet rhyme with each other (ABA: enclosed triplet), and the middle line of each tercet provides the basic rhyme for the next set of three lines. Moreover, the repetition of the last line also shapes the whole poem in the form of a circle, or rather, of a spiral, since the last line joins the beginning establishing a kind of progress over the initial position: this line, in fact, is now more prominent than it was at the

beginning because it has become a repetition and because it is strictly linked with the preceding parallel line, owing ^{to} the rhyme pattern.

Let us see what the syntactical arrangement looks like. The effect is one of interaction of grammar and verse structure. In the first part of the poem the pattern is the following: one main clause and one subordinate clause in the first and sixth line; all main clauses in ll. 2-5. Each line contains only complete clauses, and no line starts with an embedded sentence. The second part of the poem shows more complexity: two main clauses, three subordinate clauses, one main clause, one subordinate clause. There is no enclosing of complete clauses within a line: the reader's expectations are contradicted when a line is introduced by a subordinating conjunction (when), and when he discovers that the line ending does not also mark a clause ending. Moreover, the adverbial far away is interposed between the subordinating conjunction and the subject, and, furthermore, adverbials of place and time (further, still, at an unearthly height, against the sky) force him to linger before the VP (with an embedded that clause) is revealed.

In order for one to establish whether expression and content are indeed linked with each other throughout the development of the poem, the semantic component must interpret the grammatical features, and the rhythmical articulation must reflect the meaning of the poem.

Let us first of all consider a main linguistic feature of the poem: the use of the present perfect. The first line makes it clear that the beginning of the situation which is being described belongs to the past (tense); that the state experienced, expressed by the verb, is now completed (aspect); and that the relation between the cause originating the situation and the effects that may derive from it are not current (phase). All this is what the present perfect tense tells us; but there is something that the verbal form does not tell us: is the past to be

402

*It might be argued that the past might be used instead. As a matter of fact periods of time indicated by the present perfect and the past sometimes overlap; it is a question of defining what 'current relevance' is, and, as Palmer points out, "it is not easy to define what is and what is not relevant" (Palmer 1965:50-53). That I have been a leader - as the case might be here - is perhaps relevant to what I'm going to say.

understood as a definite past, or as an indefinite past? Has the experience been completed in a distant past, or only recently? What are the delayed effects of the events designated by the verb in the present perfect tense? These ambiguities will be understood more clearly from the following examples:

- a. I have been a politician for twenty years (I am still a politician today).

(The situation is related to something observable at the present time)

- b. I have been an opponent of this law on different occasions during my political career. (I still oppose it, although I am no longer a politician today).

(The situation is relevant to a period extending from a time in the past to a subsequent time in the past)

- c. A. Do you know any leaders? Can you talk reliably on this?

B. Well, I've been one myself (although I am ~~not~~ one now).

(The situation ~~is~~ relevant to a period of the past, but has also a partial relevance to the present)*

One can say that the perfect tense:

- refers to a period beginning in the past and stretching up to the present;
- has an indefiniteness which makes it appropriate for referring to a time in between earliest memory and the present;
- indicates a habitual activity as a continuous state of the past which is somehow related to the present.

There are, in fact, features of the present that link the situation to the past, whether in an obvious way, or -as is apparent from the examples below - in a less evident way. As a matter of fact, in the sentence I have been one, one is the head postmodified by a non-finite clause from which the explicit tense has disappeared: there is, therefore,

a choice of tenses in the corresponding restrictive relative clause:

1. I have been one - (since a time ~~in~~ the past and up to now) -
who has been - (all the time) - acquainted with the night;
2. I have been one - (at some indefinite time in the past which
I cannot recollect exactly) - who was - (at that particular
time) - acquainted with the night;
3. I have been one - (at some indefinite time in the past) -
who had been - (over a period in the past until that
particular time) - acquainted with the night;
4. I have been one - (at some indefinite time in the past) -
who is - (habitually) - acquainted with the night.

The sentences which follow, all have a ^{verb} in the present perfect, which could be either definite or indefinite, but with varying degrees of involvement in the past and relevance to the present in the action presented:

I have walked out [" "] back I have outwalked I have looked down	}	specific action completed	{	in a definite past in an indefinite past
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I have passed by ["] dropped	}	habitual action completed	{	in an indefinite past
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The ambiguity of the first line is unresolved, since the extent of time, during which the various events take place, cannot yet be exactly defined. It may be a recollection captured by memory as a flashback, or it may be a vivid image of a situation in which I is still involved.

So far the verbal form has not revealed the exact relationship between the time of the things talked about in the poem, and the time of the poet writing the poem; the verbal form is the same for each clause, except that one finds an ed-participial form in the embedded sentence of the first line, and an ing-participial form in the embedded sentence in the sixth line: both acquainted with the night and unwilling to explain lack

an explicit tense, although they have links with what has preceded them (but what has preceded them is not explicit), and the relationship between the temporal levels involved in the structure of the poem depends on the choice concerning the auxiliary to complete the sense.

With the next tercet it seems that we are still dealing with the ambiguities pointed out in relation to the other identical verbal forms, since I have stood can refer to a specific or habitual action; and it can also refer to an event marked by duration. The following sentence, instead, ([I have] stopped the sound of feet) implies a momentary action, with very little or no duration, which must have necessarily come to an end. Whether this happened in a distant or in a more recent past is not possible to know. However, a subordinate clause follows, introduced by the subordinator when, where the V is in the simple past tense, which indicates that the event of this clause follows immediately on the event of the main clause. What makes this delay possible is actually the use of the perfect phase. As Joos points out, when certain events are presented as effects of the preceding events stated in the perfect phase "their presentation as effects is not marked in their own verbs; that marking is done by the perfect marker on the verbs for the precedent events. The perfect-marked verbs are there specifically for the sake of the effects of the events they designate, and that is the essential meaning" (Joos 1964: 140). It is this embedded sentence which dissipates the relevance to the present of the main clause (the period of time does not extend up to the present) and the reference to the habitual use (the event is one which has recurred a number of times). At this turning point in the poem the situation is as follows:

<u>I have stood</u>	}	habitual event completed in an indefinite past
<u>[I have] stopped</u>		

The three embedded sentences present an event which took place

(when...came) and did not take place (not to call...or say), in a definite past: the time has been identified in the main clause and the past tense is in relationship with the habitual events which had taken place immediately before the event (referred to in the embedded sentence) took place. Came proclaims the interruption of the habitual events, a change of attitude in the course of life, a turning point in a mental process, a vision dream, or nightmare.

The next main clause with the verb in the past tense (proclaimed) also stresses the definiteness of the time in which the event took place. Here, in fact, the time has been identified not only in the main clause, but also in the embedded sentence; moreover the adverbials of time and place contribute to the setting of the scene. Ironically the time does not matter, because, at the moment in the poem when the time is most definite (and - as we have seen - it has become definite gradually), it is the statement on time itself which throws one (and the poet?) back into vagueness and indistinctness. But after this statement the last line is not a mere repetition of the first: here is presented a person, who has gone through all the experiences narrated in the poem, and who can only say:

I have been one (I used to be one, at some indefinite time in the past, which either I cannot identify exactly or do not find worth identifying, since the concept of time is only a relative one) who was (at that particular non-identified time) acquainted with the night.

The poem is constructed along the two components of earthly time and unearthly time, which we can respectively call "tense" and "time". "Tense" is exploited in the first half of the poem: syntactically - as we have shown with the analysis of the perfect tense - and lexically, the night, the city light, the watchman convey a relative idea of time, that of the night (the time of the clock). The location here is that of the city, where even the rain - the only natural object - becomes a part of the

artificial landscape. With line 7 the movement of the poem seems to arrive at its poise: still denotes the absence of movement and the absence of noise, reinforced by the stopping of the sound of feet: but it is not clear whether these feet belong to I or to the watchman. It is significant that when an ambiguity is dissipated, as far as time is concerned, the grammatical and lexical features become vague, and it is not possible to know what the exact semantic markers of still are, and who the referent of feet is. From now on the poem takes a definite turn; and this is when "time" becomes the protagonist.

"Time" is when the I and his counterpart are not separated from each other, but become indistinguishable: the sound of feet (my feet? your feet? the watchman's feet? anybody's feet?) has been stopped: it is not important any longer whose feet they were. The I's last action has been to socialize; then, the I disappears, together with the play of tenses and all artificial things. Things are, from now on, surrealistic: they suggest a different world, and this is achieved, syntactically, by repeating lexical items used in the first two sections and assigning them a different function than they had before;

L.2 I have walked out in rain - and back in rain

L.10. But not to call me back or say good-bye

In line 2 the coordinator and has two elements in its scope (walked out in rain/back in rain), one of which contains back; in line 10 the coordinator or has two elements in its scope too (call me back/say good-bye), one of which contains back. But there is a superadded feature to this apparent resemblance: it is itself in the scope of not (it is, therefore, negated), and not is in the scope of but (and is, therefore, adversative).

L.3 I have outwalked the furthest city light

L.11 And further still at an unearthly height

In line 3 furthest is superlative, and therefore it denies any further

object (=city light) as existing in the sequence of horizontal spatial points; in line 11 further still is comparative and establishes a vertical spatial line (= at an unearthly height); phonically, it recalls furthest: by assonance, further still^{goes} beyond furthest, and this can only happen if the direction and the time have changed.

l.6 I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet

l.11 And further still at an unearthly height

In line 6 still is an adjective and is a current attribute; in line 11 still is an adverbial which modifies another adverbial.

Moreover, this sentence is introduced by and, which has a different function here from the one it had elsewhere in the poem. And, in fact, when used cohesively merely links sentences (or categories), and there is an almost total shift from one sentence to the next; when used coordinately, it is projected backwards and expresses relations structurally. The contexts where and occurs are the following:

I have walked out in rain - and back in rain
(and links two main clauses)

I have passed by the watchman on his beat,
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain
(and links two main clauses)

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away...
(and links two main clauses)

But not to call me back or say goodbye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky
Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
(and is an adverbial which introduces a new situation not merely linked to the previous one, but related retrospectively to all the preceding situations.)

The luminary clock is itself ambiguous: "luminary" indicates both an artificial light and a natural light (like that of the heavenly bodies); moreover, the "clock" measures the artificial time (what we have referred to as "tense"), but with the specifications in its environment (luminary, against the sky, at an unearthly height), and its capability of "proclaiming" it becomes a screen $\bar{I} + \text{material} \bar{I}$ for one to look through and discover "things" which are beyond it $\bar{I} - \text{material} \bar{I}$. It is a visual device for something which is not only not visual, but also unconceivable for the human mind.

One can look back now at the different partitions of the poem and find that each one of them has a semantic connection: the formal division into stanzas gives relief to the last stanza in which the resolution of the poem is found; the rhyme organization links the stanzas to one another and emphasizes the last two lines by creating a closer link between them than in any other consecutive lines; the syntactical arrangement emphasizes the complexity of the second half of the poem where the ambiguities are partly dissipated; and finally, the last line being identical with the first, the implications of the second half of the poem are foregrounded and - these implications having been discovered - the repetition itself acquires a different meaning, no longer ambiguous, but in keeping with the tone of the poem and strictly linked with the preceding line which contains the main point of the poem. Night itself changes its meaning as the poem develops: at the beginning, it is the night of the human time - at some point in the clock - when the sun has set; at the end, it no longer concerns human time, but eternal Time, in which night is the symbol of eternity: darkness exists in order for the light to shine. The contraries are reconciled.

The rhythmical organization of the poem accompanies its logical development, and marks the shifts in tone marked by the syntactical

arrangement. In the first two tercets, the metre is regular and slow; but it becomes animated with the first line of the third tercet: in four lines there are only two plurisyllabic words, which makes the rhythm less declamatory and more conversational. With the structural and the initial pace is regained, and the tone quality expresses resolution by means of its modulated measure.

The Jungle

It is not the still weight
of the great trees, the
breathless interior of the wood,
tangled with wrist-thick
vines, the flies, reptiles,
the forever fearful monkeys
screaming and running
in the branches -

but

!
a girl waiting
shy, brown, soft-eyed -
to guide you
Upstairs, sir.

William Carlos Williams

"The Jungle" belongs to a collection of poems published in 1934 as Collected Earlier Poems after Williams had been involved with Objectivist Poetry for a few years. Luis Zukofsky and the other "objectivist" poets banished the sequence of time from poetry and produced poems that could be called "objective" because they had as a referent not a world of ideas but a "possible" experience. The stress was on the function of the "object" (which needn't be a concrete one), which had to be dealt with according to a rigorously planned structure. Impressions, symbols, psychological states were avoided; the concrete experience of an object or even a state of mind was to be the ultimate aim of the poem. In Williams' Autobiography (Williams 1967) we read:

The Objectivist theory was this: we had had "Imagism" (Amygism, as Pound had called it), which ran quickly out. That, though it had been useful in ridding the field of verbiage, had no formal necessity implicit in it. It had already dribbled off into so called "free verse" which, as we saw, was a misnomer. There is no such thing as free verse! Verse is measure of some sort. "Free verse" was without measure and needed none for its projected objectifications. Thus the poem had run down and became formally non extant.

But, we argued, the poem, like every other form of art, is an object, an object that in itself formally presents its case and its meaning by the very form it assumes. Therefore, being an object, it should be so treated and controlled - but not as in the past. For past objects have about them past necessities, - like the sonnet - which have conditioned them and from which, as a form itself, they cannot be freed.

The poem being an object (like a symphony or cubist painting) it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day. This was what we wished to imply by Objectivism, an antidote, in a sense, to the bare image haphazardly presented in loose verse. (264-265)

In discussing Pound's Draft of 30 Cantos which had been published in 1931, Williams wrote:³

He /_Pound_/ uses a poem, words, modes that have been modified by use - not an idea. He uses the poem *Odyssey* objectively. (105)

In the final adverb are included all the uses that have been made of the poem by readers throughout the centuries. The *Odyssey* has, therefore, as a referent, not its gestae, but its function as a poem. And it is the referent of the Grecian poem that Ezra Pound exploits as a functional element within his *Cantos*: Pound's work is a model of all sorts of possible experiences outwith time limits.

What Williams wrote of the Cantos may well apply to his treatment of the "jungle" as object. He, in fact, presents a complex image, deals with the uses that are made of it linguistically, and substitute the accepted convention with a new, linguistically objective, convention. But, in subscribing to the Objectivist manifesto, Williams plays variations on the main theme. One can't ignore the effect that the imagistic technique has on the making of "The Jungle". As a matter of fact, according to the canons of Imagism (and the later Vorticism) the experience presented in the poem is an experience for the addressee, who is left free to establish his own links within the limits of the linguistic code. So, not only has the addressee to supply the necessary conditions for the success of the poetic act, but also it is the addressee's manner of experiencing the poem which is the poem itself. It is the way in which the social negotiation of meanings between addresser and addressee takes place that constitutes what the poem is about. The imagists

being so careful to avoid embellishments, superfluous adjectives, temporal dimensions, a good amount of meaning is theoretically supplied by the reader himself. In fact, as much meaning as possible. And the natural development of Imagism, Vorticism, also appealed to Objectivists: Zukofsky, in fact, in his paper "American Poetry 1920-1930" affirmed ⁴:

In the last ten years Pound has not concerned himself merely with isolation of the image - a cross-breeding between single words which are absolute symbols for things and textures -

The sand that night like a seal's back

Glossy

- but with the poetic locus produced by the passage from one

image to another. His Cantos are, in this sense, one extended image. One cannot pick from them a solitary poetic idea or a dozen variations of it, as out of Eliot's Waste Land, and say this is the substance out of which this single atmosphere emanates. The Cantos cannot be described as a sequence. A synopsis may no more be given of them than of a box, a leaf, a chair, a picture: they are an image of his world, "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (134-5).

What Zukofsky liked in the Cantos was the natural sequence between image and image, situation and situation, cluster of ideas and cluster of ideas, which is produced in the reader's mind without the links being explicitly provided. As a matter of fact, there is no "...is like..." connection between the images; the communication of experiences has as goal something that is beyond the intrinsic meaning of the experience, namely the communication of the strategic building up of the experience. It is the reader's experience in going through the poet's experience that is the poem; and this experience must have a form (with ideas continuously rushing in it). The "formal necessity" adequate to the contemporary world that the Objectivists were looking for, Zukofsky discovers in Pound's principle "Emotion is an organizer of forms", thus stating his concern for the work of art as controlled work.

That the main concern of the new artist in the second decade of the XXth century was the structural aspect of the object is proved by the experiments with Cubism in painting, which led to the conviction that reality is a convention, and that another sort of possible convention can be brought forward and analysed in each of its components, as long as it is an experience, not a generic impression. When Gombrich discusses Picasso's *Still life with violin* (1912), he emphasizes the fact that the painter did not intend to reveal to the observer what a violin looks like; but rather to involve the observer in a cerebral game, that is building up the idea of a plastic object by means of some flat fragment drawn on a canvas.⁵ Some of the tenets of Cubism as set forth by Barbara Rose in American Art Since 1900 are true of Williams's poetry:⁶

the analysis of both the structure of object and the means by which objects are received, the assertion of the independent, self-referential reality of the work of art...

The adjective independent here suggests that conventional modes are banished; self-referential insists that the model of the work of art is not reality, but its own model, that is, the linguistic matter out of which it is composed.

Williams's poem "The Jungle" presents an experience - a linguistic and social experience - which lies outside any accepted convention, and produces activity on the part of the reader, who is busy building up expectations based upon the text's signs, and upon his own perception of the text's signs, and remodelling his apprehension of the poem on its referent whenever a new element occurs in the decoding of the text that may affect the reading process at any point in time.

The poem is constructed upon two blocks syntactically opposed:

It is not ... but ...

If one considers the first block one realizes that it is made up of a sequence of noun phrases, the head being often premodified as well as postmodified, preceded by the definite article which creates the point of contact between addresser and addressee, with semantic relationships between its attributes: the whole thing can be read as the "comment" to the "aboutness" expressed by the title. It, in this case, carries thematic and focal prominence, being a pro-form of the jungle and the given element in the sentence. But it - alongside the first reading - could also be interpreted as a pro-form introducing a cleft-sentence in which case all the material constituting the predication would be "given", the "new" element being the material following but, which is encapsulated, as it were, within the given element that contains also the reader (you) as point of contact between the sender of the message and himself, and, therefore, also a part of the information structure.

It is important for the meaning of the poem that we discriminate between the interpretation of it as referential or as anticipatory pronoun, because the context of situation would be different. If one takes the poem as an answer to a request for a definition (of the type of "What is the jungle?"), then it works as an anaphoric pronoun:

It [the jungle] is not the still weight [what it conventionally is taken to be] but a girl ... to guide you [a situation involving you and another person]

It here has a topical function; it is the point of contact between addresser and addressee, the given element, while the rest of the stanza is new. One could paraphrase the first stanza as "the jungle is not what you think that its meaning should be; in fact, it is not its literal meaning, as everybody understands the word, but

it is a girl that is somehow involved with you! The jungle, in fact, is not the weight of the trees, the interior of the wood, tangled with wrist-thick vines, the flies, the monkeys screaming and running in the branches, as, literally, the jungle is. The literal description of the jungle is obtained by leaving out the modifications that imply an observer. Conversely, with all the modifications filled in, that is to say in the presence of an observer, the literal, objective aspect of the jungle, becomes a psychological state: the weight of the trees is still, the interior of the wood breathless, the flies are reptiles (in one interpretation, at least, that is if reptiles is taken to be appositional), the monkeys are forever fearful. In this last occurrence the adverb forever emphasizes the presence of an observer. But the jungle is not even that. What is it, instead? A girl waiting, shy, brown ... to guide you... The modifications here are all semiotically relevant: Waiting may be a sign that somebody is keeping her waiting. A sign of submission, emblematic of patience, and therefore introducing idea of compliance, of being at someone else's behest? Shy may be a sign that she feels inferior, or that she is inferior. Anyway, she looks shy. Brown may be a sign of absence of enough light, or a sign of suntan, or a sign that she's coloured. Is it a sign of the girl who belongs to an exploited race? Soft-eyed may be a sign for an inner (the soul's) sweetness.

The poem is an image that directly presents; but it is not only this. With it cataphorical, the context of situation is completely different:

It is not the jungle in its metaphorical aspect or in its literal aspect that I'm interested in, but the jungle in its semiotic aspect (the jungle is a sign that the social dimension as exemplified in a girl exists, and that the you - addressee? Reader? Fictitious character? - is involved and plays a role

within this social dimension.)

It as pro-form of a cleft-sentence has a source in the preceding discourse: Bolinger, in Meaning and Form, (1977), provides a profusion of examples to demonstrate that there must be a "prior basis" to the information one is asking if "it" is to be used.⁴ He argues:

The neatest proof of prior information is the contrast in the answers to original and reclamatory questions, the latter by definition laying a basis since they repeat what has already been said (. 71)

The strategy here is that of establishing a semantic basis to it the addresser's state of mind that conceives of the jungle as a literal and metaphorical convention, and, at the same time, highlights the second element of the contrastive comparison by letting it carry the focus of the information. The challenge to the established convention is made by the addressee who is involved in the discourse. So, the way in which the addressee would reconstruct the poem is, in fact, the matter of the poem, but the process of assigning meanings must be plausible and appropriate and in keeping with the linguistic conventions, that is with the pragmatic aspect of the linguistic communication. Bolinger points out:

Linguistic meaning covers a great deal more than reports of events in the real world. It expresses, sometimes in very obvious ways, other times in ways that are hard to ferret out, such things as what is the central part of the message as against the peripheral part, what our attitudes are toward the person we are speaking to, how we feel about the reliability of our message, how we situate ourselves in the events we report, and many other things that make our message not merely a recital of facts but a complex of facts and comments about facts and situations (. 4).

The semantic weight of the anticipatory it depends also on the fact

that one is reading a poem, not an account of what is meant by jungle. Therefore, if the poem is not just simply a definition of the jungle, but a statement about the poet's conception of the jungle, it is likely to have, as prior basis, an objective experience undergone by the poet. The poem constitutes the response to a question that includes all the linguistic material in the scope of not. It is the attitude toward this material (= conventional use of the jungle) that the poet is accounting for; the poet's attitude as well as the reader's attitude. The negative operator introduces the false core of the question, the object that is being challenged, the material that cannot satisfy the composition of a poem. To all this he opposes the exchange between the object of the poem having human qualities (= a girl) and the addressee, involved in the poem itself. The poem is contradicting a convention, a fact already broached, something universally affirmed, by giving it a new function: the conventional way of looking at things changes according to the role of the observer/actor who provides the interaction between addresser and addressee. The role of you is crucial: it is not the empirical reader, but includes a class of persons who can cooperate at different textual levels to make decisions about the text. It is not so much the statement itself that is of interest, but the strategy of discourse according to which the linguistic act is produced. The interpretation of the poem forces the reader to act metalinguistically, that is by making linguistic statements on the linguistic texture of the poem:

Let us discuss, now, the question of the "literal" and "metaphorical" jungle. First of all, here are the noun phrases (nouns and their modifiers) that reflect what is known about the jungle, although rejected by the poet as the features of the jungle in which he's interested:

the still weight of the great trees

the breathless interior of the wood, tangled with wrist-thick vines

the flies, reptiles

the forever fearful monkeys screaming and running in the branches

Each of these noun phrases has some modifier that describes the noun qualitatively. Still, great, breathless, fearful are inherent qualities of the nouns that they modify, while wrist-thick, reptiles (as apposition), fearful (interpreted as "exciting fear") are descriptive of the sense of plasticity, discomfort, fear aroused in the observer. The first set of adjectives describe the perception on the speaker's part of some abstract qualities (the weight, the interior), or the intrinsic and abstract characteristics of some concrete objects (the trees, the monkeys); the second set of adjectives provides a tangible or observable comparison (the vines are as thick as a wrist, the flies are similar to reptiles, the monkeys are very frightening and very frightened (according to the double interpretation of fearful as "exciting fear" and "full of fear"). The conventional definition of the jungle is not only something to be accepted but also something to be checked against one's own data: one can consider either its metaphorical aspect, or its literal aspect, or both (are the trees great psychologically or physically?), but the reader has no possibility of intervening on the text. He can check the thickness of the vines or the general atmosphere in the jungle, but he cannot act, or establish a relationship with the jungle or the creatures of the jungle. There is a sense of imprisonment in the entanglement of plants and animals: the vines encircle and constrict the trees, the flies are trapped within the plants and are crawling about like snakes, the monkeys are jumping from one tree to another, always remaining within a circumscribed space. There is also an atmosphere of fear evoked by monstrous shapes, wild screams, swift movements, which is opposed to the "stillness" of the weight of the trees, denoting both absence of movement and absence of sound. According to the imagistic logic the attributes characterizing the jungle are all

in a semantic relation:

stillness (absence of movement) corresponding to

breathlessness (absence of breath, not moving)

breathlessness (surprise) caused by extraordinary
states of affairs, such as fear

fearfulness (exciting fear) causing breathlessness in
observer by means of screaming and running around

fearfulness (feeling fear) shown by screaming and running away

screaming and running of monkeys causing breathlessness and
stillness (absence of movement and of sound)

breathlessness (absence of breath) caused by entanglement of
vines around wood

The description of the jungle is not a copy of nature but rather the description of an object whose several faces - even opposed and contrasting - are seen at once. The life in the jungle is presented as a new reality containing not only the objective features but also the fragmentation of the object, carried out by the observer. According to the canons of Objectivism and Cubism the interest lies in the structure of the poem itself, in its multiple facets and in the multiple views of the object described. The semantic features are not examined in depth, but are continuously changing, according to the observer's point of view. Analyzing the second stanza, we will see how the Objectivist poet uses the jungle of the actual world to give shape to an image which is made out of the jungle itself; only, it becomes an abstraction, growing out of a real object, and resembling it.

The second block of information following but is syntactically more compressed, in that its head-noun - the only noun within the punctuation mark separating it from the last two lines - is postmodified by an ing adjectival form whose scope can extend into the infinitive clause which closes the poem, and is preceded by the indefinite article, allowing both an abstract reading of girl (not identified as a real person) and a concrete reading of girl (one of the girls who were there). With the final infinitive clause a new character is brought into the picture within the social action of the description, and this new character interacts not only with the addresser (the sender of the message addresses himself to him), but also with the girl (the girl is to guide him upstairs). The reader becomes involved in the situation and has to play his role. Let us examine the postmodifiers to a girl:

waiting shy, brown, soft-eyed

A girl waiting is syntactically ambiguous, since the head noun is postmodified by an ing form that can be a reduction of a relative clause with the verb in the present tense, or of a relative clause with the verb in the present continuous tense. The following sentences:

a. Monkeys screaming in their cages in a zoo frighten me.

b. Monkeys screaming in their cages are frightening me.

are, respectively, a reduction of:

c. Monkeys who scream in their cages in a zoo frighten me.

and

d. Monkeys who are screaming in their cages are frightening me.

The former utterance presents a situation not bound to the zoo, while the latter can only be pronounced in a situation in which the screaming monkeys are actually there. So, the reading of screaming can be, in one case, the potential and generic, in the other case, the specific and actual. A girl waiting has a double function:

e. a girl who waits to guide you upstairs

f. (the stress is on the routine act)

a girl who's waiting to guide you upstairs

(the stress is on the contingent situation)

The interpretation of waiting in the poem depends on the interpretation of you. You is a generic pronoun with an impersonal function, or, maybe, the reader? Waiting could be either generic or specific. You is the reader in the text, with the precise role of acting on the text, to participate in it, to interact with the addresser? Waiting is bound to the textual situation, it's a part of the textual strategy: it is ambiguous.

A girl waiting involves the reader in the text, strategically; but is, in fact, a very explicit new turn in respect of the previous stanza where the reader himself was trapped in the meanings and wasn't left free to choose his role. The modifiers following waiting have a different semantic quality from the attributes of the preceding stanza: shyness, brownness, soft-eyedness vary on the basis of the idea each addressee has of those qualities. They involve degrees varying from reader to reader, and are perceived as a social expression of the girl's position. As a matter of fact, although

the girl is shy

the girl is brown

the girl is soft-eyed

denote intrinsic qualities, the three adjectives differ in their degree of subjectivity. Each reader could perceive them differently, therefore it is the reader who provides the common denominator between them on the basis of which they can be more or less freely conjoined. On the observer's analysis of her appearance (looking

shy, looking brown, looking soft-eyed) depends their meaning.

The reader's consciousness is the presupposition of the description.

The infinitive clause to guide you / Upstairs, sir can be in the scope of waiting, or outside the scope of waiting, in other words it can function as the goal of the girl's action, or as a temporal sequence. The relative clause reduction can have two different roots, as in:

g . That is the girl who waits to take the people upstairs.

h . That is the girl who's waiting to take the people upstairs .

both of which can yield:

i . That is the girl waiting to take the people upstairs.

If this sentence stems from g then the girl has a precise function or job to execute; if the sentence stems from h then the -ing form functions as a temporal sequence (the girl is there and what will happen is that she will take you upstairs). To go back to the context of situation in the poem, you is submitted to the girl's action - in one reading -, but you submits the girl to his own will in the temporal reading. Again, if one takes the last line as the content of the girl's invitation Upstairs, sir (as if the last line was in inverted commas), then the reader is obligatorily involved in the poem, as he has been involved throughout the poem, without realizing it fully. What the writer is doing is answering a question put to him by his interlocutor; what the reader is doing is taking part, dramatically, in the action, and supplying his own experience as reader of the poem, so that the reader is not, conventionally, one average reader, but each reader of the poem. The jungle is what the reader is: not a conventional jungle, but all the ways of reading the poem. The reader's psychological experience is what the poem is about; the interest is not in the statement itself, but in the strategy of discourse

within which the linguistic act is produced.

The topic of the jungle is what happens in the jungle (the real jungle), what happens in the literary jungle (the metaphorical and poetical jungle), what happens in the human jungle (the social jungle, framed by the stylistic code in which sir denotes a formal rather than familiar relationship, and in which the role of guide is played by someone who knows the place, and where the upstairs part of a building is, as conventionally, the place where things "take place"). The topic of the poem is also the jungle as abstraction of the jungle, the jungle as sign (the sign of how the jungle can be used to make a poem). So, the poem is also about how a poem is made, which has a pragmatic value: it, in fact, depends on the use of the poem on the part of the reader, and the rules of coherence are different according to the various "stories" of the text. To discover this last topic means to discover a regularity in the textual strategy and the relationship between the addresser, the addressee and the text.

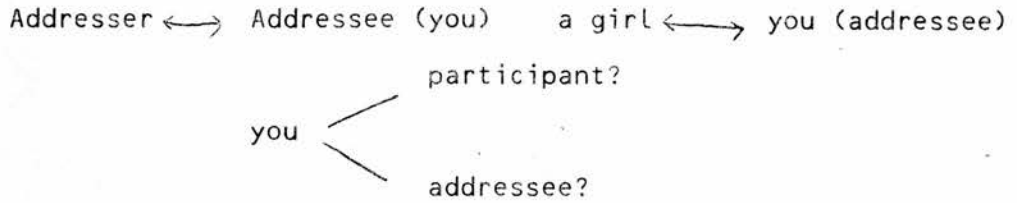
The situation of this text is rather complex, in that it involves layers of interpretation, arising from the different semiotic and semantic functions of its elements. According to Halliday's scheme, one can distinguish between "field", "tenor" and "mode" of discourse. This scheme seems to be particularly useful to supply evidence for the pragmatic as well as semantic values of this text.

The social action of this text is made up of a series of acts which form the field of discourse, and is, therefore, a complex social action. It consists of an act of denial as regards a conventional attitude assumed by the speaker, and an act of assertion as "new" contrastive affirmation. Such acts have corresponding meanings on the semantic level, in the same way

as the behaviour potential has a corresponding meaning potential before the act is actually performed. The convention that is being negated is assumed by the addresser to be observed by his addressee, either explicitly through the immediate cataphoric link between it and the jungle, or through the more subtle anaphoric link between it and the series of NPs following the negation, which are implicitly linked with some prior cognitive assumption in the addresser's consciousness. Semantically, the act of denial corresponds to the nature and scope of the negation, and the act of contrastive assertion to the nature and scope of the contrastive conjunction but. On the textual level the links between the situation and the title, or between the situation and the prior cognitive assumption, are expressed by elements of textual cohesion (it = anaphoric or cataphoric), and the distribution of information units in the structure of the poem including problems concerning the focus and presupposition (what I'm going to talk about, what I'm interested in). So the act of communication concerns both the addresser's assumptions about the addressee and the addressee's expectations, which can be either reinforced or contradicted.

Addresser and addressee perform a social role through their exchange of meanings and their acting upon each other: in fact there is no communication if they share exactly the same knowledge; there is communication if a negotiation of meaning is established. During their social intercourse either of them can overcome the other in a sort of free exchange controlled at the semantic level. This social interaction becomes more complex towards the end of the poem, when the following possibilities for the social roles to be performed exist:

Addresser \longleftrightarrow Addressee a girl \longleftrightarrow you



You can be extracted from, or be left inherently in, the text. The role of you may be either played by the addressee, or be that of a character in a play, or be functional in the image itself. The first role is that of the reader who is both recipient of the message and the "doer", because he supplies the experiences for the poem to combine with and be apprehended as concrete, objective matter, instead of remaining an abstract piece of language. The second role is like that of a character in a play: he can speak or be silent, but he is there to modulate the language in the environment. The third role played by the reader is that of participating in the structure of the image itself: the image can be evoked, because the reader exists, and is in relationship with the image itself. In the economy of the poem the role of you affects the meaning of the whole poem. The role of the addressee is highly ambiguous, because he is, simultaneously, himself, a creature of the poem, and a creature of the addresser. The negotiation of meanings, therefore, takes place between participants and/or between writer and reader, addresser and addressee, writer and character. So, you is also involved in the subject matter of the poem: the question can be accounted for with reference to the coreferentiality between the pronoun you and the vocative form sir, and with reference to the semantics of coherence (elliptical syntax, absence of mood, viewpoint). Finally, the mode of the poem is specified in the self-

sufficiency of the text: the text is a sign of the mode of constructing a poem. The textual semiosis (attributes as signs) meets the textual coherence (relationship between semantic elements), and the function of the poem is the way in which the reader apprehends, uses, recreates the addresser's signs to construct his meaning. The poem, thus, delineates itself as the meetingground of semantic values and pragmatic values.

Proletarian Portrait

A big young bareheaded woman
in an apron

Her hair slicked back standing
on the street

One stockinged foot toeing
the sidewalk

Her shoe in her hand. Looking
intently into it

She pulls out the paper insole
to find the nail

That has been hurting her

William Carlos Williams.

The poem belongs to the Collected Earlier Poems (1934).

It consists, structurally, of two blocks of information: one is a complex NP establishing what the poem is about, the other is a complex sentence, fastened on the previous block through the anaphoric it, a pro-form of the head noun woman. Despite the throwaway manner in which it is written (there is no main verb in the first block, in fact, as if the poet was sketching in details very rapidly), the contextual implications the poem carries are considerable.

The title-word portrait anticipates the pictorial-photographic effect that is more directly conveyed by the first structural block - the head noun with multiple pre- and post-modifications - which constitutes the topic of the poem. But is a portrait designed to convey, objectively, the likeness of the features and the état-d'âme of the person so that the result would reveal the physical as well as psychological traits of the model? Or must a portrait also reveal the painter's attitude towards the portrait itself, and act on the observer so that the latter would be allowed to mould it, re-shape it according to his own perceptions, and re-create it? Undoubtedly, a portrait should achieve the synthesis between the physical-psychological traits of the person painted - or, as in this case, described verbally - and its symbolic overtones. Such portrait would be necessarily ambiguous, because neither the person's soul, nor the painter's attitude, nor the observer's expectations could be completely anticipated. A portion of the "life" of the person should always be left hidden, to be wondered about, since vagueness and indistinctness are, after all,

features proper of human nature.

The portrait of the woman is defined as proletarian in the title. The attribute often characterizes the referent of the noun directly, as in the following phrase:

a. A beautiful house

Here the adjective can be labeled as "inherent" attribute.

But in the phrase:

b. An old friend

the adjective is "non-inherent", because it refers to the friendship and does not characterize the person. In the title phrase, proletarian portrait, there are two possibilities of interpretation: that proletarian denote the provenance of the portrait (a portrait springing from the proletariat, or composed according to the canons of a proletarian literature); or that it characterize the woman portrayed (a portrait of a proletarian woman). In either cases, the attribute proletarian is "non-inherent". The meaning of the title depends on the contextual organization of the message. In a situation such as the following:

c. A. What was your friend's contribution to this year's exhibition?

B. A proletarian portrait.

proletarian refers to the representation of the picture, to the person portrayed. In the following situation:

d. (In an art gallery)

A. Who is that portrait by?

B. I don't know; it's a proletarian portrait.

proletarian refers to the provenance of the author of the picture, or his adherence to the canons of proletarian literature (maybe, the author is Russian, and the portrait is that of a wealthy old lady).

The complex NP of the first part of the poem reinforces the interpretation of proletarian as an attribute of the woman. She, in fact, is described as:

<u>big</u>	physically strong and/or noticeable	strong strong; and/ or careless of her figure ...
<u>bareheaded</u> <u>in an apron</u>	hatless and aproned	maybe indifferent to fashion or middle- class feminine dress conventions for the public streets ...
<u>her hair stuck</u> <u>back</u>	no style in her coiffure	lacking in vanity ..
<u>one stockinged foot</u> <u>toeing the sidewalk</u> <u>her shoe in her hand</u>	her foot hurts	no personal dignity in public places; in- different to conventions ...

All these modifications demand a referential and logical presupposition of existence - if the woman did not exist, it would be impossible to establish the truth-value of the modifications. Semiotically, all the modifications of the NP woman are effective on the level of immediate social realism, but they also carry a further significance or symbolic value in the light of the attribute of the title. All the modifications contain the author's comment, the woman is not even allowed to have a personal dignity, because of pressures from everyday needs; she's not allowed to look after herself, in spite of her being young, though no mere child or girl, probably because it would be too costly and she couldn't afford it; she is careless of social conventions, such as taking off one's apron before one goes out, or putting a hat on, because she's too much worried about her economic problems, or simply because she has not been taught her "manners", or has not been brought up to care about her person. All this takes on

a political significance, the political associations being established by the author, and the interpretation of the political dimension being supplied by the reader in his interaction with the poet. Every single detail carries an implication, every detail is a sign.

The portrait is a portrait of a proletarian young woman: she has all the traits and characteristics of typical working-class origin. But is the social criticism also so evident? Is the author sympathizing with the woman? The scene is extremely objective, although it may have connotations such as those mentioned above. These depend, to a great extent, on a person's individual attitude towards the thing referred to. So, the reader may sense such connotations, but there is no evidence of the author's sympathizing with, or his rejection of, the woman's social condition.

The second block of information is the comment to the NP. It is the adverbial phrase her shoe in her hand that provides the element upon which the comment is constructed, via the anaphoric it. It is looking that is topicalized:

Looking
intently into it

She pulls out the paper insole

and it is a perception that is given as heading to the following description. Had she or shoe been topicalized, it might have created a mere sequence to the previous proposition. The -ing form looking is also a stylistic link between part 1 and part 2: it recalls the two continuative aspect verbals, standing and toeing, that convey the duration and dynamism of the scene. But it is the

adverbial of manner, intently, that adds to the logical coherence of the situation. The coherence appears in the temporal development, which is constructed upon the logical sequence "this happening, the other follows", and in the girl's seriousness of purpose, conveyed by the adverbial intently. The latter reinforces the impression of a goal-directed activity, suggested by the inherently ambiguous to-infinitive clause which follows the main clause.

An infinitive clause may or may not carry implications of deliberate purpose. The two sentences:

e. We arrived at the station to find that the train had just left.

f. He turned away casually to find two policemen watching him. show a difference in the subject's attitude towards the content of the infinitive clause. In sentence e, it is not "our" intention to miss the train, though an intention to board it (now frustrated) is implied. In the second sentence, there is no intentionality whatever; there is only a change in the man's focus of attention followed by his being confronted with something unexpected. Casually suggests complete lack of immediate purpose and no intention of evading police surveillance. In sentence f only could be inserted in order to express frustrated expectation or intention explicitly. In the following sentence:

g. The President went to the airport to board the afternoon jumbo jet for Canada.

the intention is expressly conveyed by the infinitive clause: it was in the plans - and in the President's intentions - to board the plane which would take him to Canada. If one inserted "in order" before Williams's infinitive clause, - "(in order) to find the nail" - the meaning of the infinitive clause would be restricted to explicit expression of intentionality. The sentence:

- h. She pulls out the paper insole in order to
find the nail that has been hurting her.

could be appropriate to a situation in which only the intention is expressed, and not the act itself. Sentence g, too, could be uttered in a situation in which the action has not eventually taken place: the President may have ended up in hospital, following an attempt on his life at the airport. Also, the idea of frustrated purpose and defeated expectancy is ruled out, because one could not logically and coherently insert "only" - though grammatically one could - in Williams's sentence:

- i. She pulls out the paper insole, only to find
the nail that has been hurting her.

But in the poem, we don't just see the woman looking into her shoe in order to find some unidentified source of discomfort, but actually locating what she has suspected, and now knows for certain: a shoemaker's sole-nail has penetrated the thin leather sole of her shoe. This is explained by the fact that an infinitive clause may be used simply to express immediate succession in time. Sentences e and f show the same temporal sequence as sentences j and k:

- j. We arrived at the station and found that the
train had just left.
k. He turned away casually and found two policemen
watching him.

Williams's lines, re-written as:

- l. She pulls out the paper insole and finds
the nail that has been hurting her

also show a temporal, as well as logical, sequence. In the light of the title, all this has socio-economic-political implications. The woman discovers what she probably thought was the cause of her discomfort. The finding of the nail acts as a symptom of the

economy in which she lives.

The nail is grammatically 'new' and the final important focus, being the closure-element of the poem. But it is situationally treated as 'given', as if it was in the woman's mind. In the sequence of actions of the woman

Looking → finding nail

the use of the definite article suggests that she has been thinking for some time that it was what she actually found that had been hurting her (not, for instance, some extraneous object, such as a little stone, or a lump or seam in her stocking, and so on). At the moment when she discovers that she has found exactly what she had thought, and not something that has accidentally got into the shoe, she can confirm the fact, and become even more aware of her social condition: she's wearing cheap shoes, and the nail in the shoe becomes the sign of working-class wretchedness, or even misery and suffering, which are not only sensed or guessed through the description of the woman, but are also identified in the reader's awareness of the woman's awareness. The woman may have the intention to find the nail in order to abolish the cause of her discomfort, or she may look earnestly inside the shoe and accept the inevitable consequence of her status, that is what she had been guessing for some time.

The final conflation of past with present in has been hurting her gives a historical dimension to the poem. The fact - both her discomfort and working class sufferings - has started in the past and is continuing in the present when it has finally - and perhaps purposively - been located. The portrait is complete: physically, the big, bareheaded, young proletarian woman is there; psychologically, she is also there, and there is more than a hint at the fact that she can universalize her condition, and let the episode take on a wider political significance. The portrait

itself may be proletarian (that is, have a proletarian origin), in that it is possible to look at it from a proletarian point of view, and it may as well be the portrait of a proletarian woman (which - in fact - it surely is). The reader constructs his own portrait, sensing its ambiguities, making it alive by letting it become dynamic, perceiving a mere look of eagerness for more comfort, or the realization, on the woman's part, of a social condition that does not allow any feminine vanity, decorum or decency in her standard of living. The construction of the reader is the real portrait of the woman, the image of a real, lively, suffering, conscious person, not of a rigid, static, statue-like figure.

Contrary Theses (I)

Now grapes are plush upon the vines.

A soldier walks before my door.

The hives are heavy with the combs.

Before, before, before my door.

And seraphs cluster on the domes,

And saints are brilliant in fresh cloaks.

Before, before, before my door.

The shadows lessen on the walls.

The bareness of the house returns.

An acid sunlight fills the halls.

Before, before. Bloodsmears the oaks.

A soldier stalks before my door.

Wallace Stevens

W. Stevens

The poem belonging to the collection Parts of a World published in 1942, is characterized by a shifting of perspective, which concerns the location in which something is being observed and the dimension in time in which something is being conceived of, as well as the attitude of mind with which something is being considered. What is actually happening in the poem concerns three distinct worlds: the world of natural phenomena, in which changes occur with each passing day, season, year; the world of supernatural phenomena, inhabited by non-human creatures; the world of a particular place, the enclosed space of a house, where events take place within four walls. But these three worlds are not kept separate: they interfere with each other, creating a tension between the domain of the outside world and that of the consciousness.

Throughout the poem one can only behold facts and discover effects; causes are not actually described, but are suggested by the shape of the poem, and by internal linguistic associations.

General characteristics of the poem are:

- no tenses other than the present;
- only main clauses
- only current attributes

That only main clauses are used excludes any non-symmetrical relation holding between two clauses, in such a way that one is a constituent of the other: there is no hierarchy, no complexity, no ambiguity in the interrelation of clauses (such as that deriving from the extension of the scope of an element into an embedded sentence). If the relationships between sentences are not established by means of embedding, so there must be different factors connecting the sentences to one another. Such factors are: syntactic devices, like time relaters (now, before), the use of determiners (the, a), and the use of the logical connector and;

semantic implications (current attributes; Verbs indicating a process);
 phonetic equivalence (rhyme: combs/domes, walls/halls; echoes:
walks/stalks, cloaks/oaks; repetitions: before my door); lexical
 equivalences (items belonging to a particular set, such as grapes, hives,
 or seraphs, saints, or shadows, sunlight).

The only tense used is the simple present, indicating a period of time
 - short, long, or eternal - that includes the present moment (the historic
 'present is a way of treating the past as vividly as if it were present).

A non-progressive form reports an activity, "but it is rarely that we
 need to report a present activity, for the simple, but non-linguistic reason
 that if the speaker can observe it (at the present time) so too in most
 circumstances can the hearer". ^(Palmer 1965:82) This statement of Palmer's would account
 for the lack of reference to the duration of the activity as rather odd:
 the fact is that only the event in itself is being considered, not the moment
 of its development, whereas in normal conversation the event would be
 associated with its duration ^{or with repetition.} Let us consider the following sentences:

stress on activity: a. I went to the shops yesterday.

stress on duration: b. I was going to the shops when you called me.

c. Where are you going? I'm going to the shops.

stress on habitual

activity: d. I always go to the shops on Saturdays.

stress on habitual

activity and

repetition: e. I'm always going to the shops on Saturdays.

stress on activity: f. I go to the shops today.

Sentence f reports a present activity which tends to be interpreted as a habitual activity, while sentence a would commonly refer to a non-habitual activity. But, in fact, there can be a contrast between a present and a past activity, neither of them apparently habitual. Sentence f would be preceded by a sentence like:

g. I went to the bank yesterday.

In this case only the activities are taken into consideration, there is no stress on duration and habit.

One can, in fact, feel such a contrast in the poem, even if no past tense is used and no past time is explicitly mentioned. Hints of a contrast past/present are:

- 1 the adverbial now
- 2 the ambiguous use of before and and
- 3 current attributes connected with a particular time of the year
- 4 verbs indicating a change of conditions

Now, in the particular position it occupies in the first line, could have two distinct functions: that of adverbial and that of conjunction. But the punctuation (no comma after now, and full stop at the end of the line) must be taken into account in order to interpret it. First of all we can take two examples in which now is an adverbial, yet occupies different positions:

h. Apples are ripe now.

Here now carries a connotation of time: at this moment, at this particular time of the year. But in the following example:

- i. (The teacher has been speaking about the necessity for his pupils to wait until fruits are mature enough, before they eat them). Now, the apples in our orchard are ripe, and we can eat them.

the idea of the present time is weakened, and now is used to clarify

the preceding explanation. But when now is used in the initial position, the sense of time is lost, and the adverbial indicates a transition from one idea to the other:

j. Now these apples seem to me to be ripe.

This sentence presupposes a preceding discourse, probably on the degree of ripeness of the fruit in question. But in our poem, there is no preceding discourse, therefore the presupposition is not expressed, and could, at the most, be guessed. When now is used as a temporal conjunction, it indicates a condition according to which what follows may take place: in view of the fact X, Y can take place, as in the following example:

K. Now (that) apples are ripe, we can eat them.

Now may be optionally followed by that. What is puzzling is that, in order for "now" in its initial position to be an adverbial, there should be a preceding presupposed context; in order for it to be a conjunction, there should be a following context. It seems, then, that the time sequence is only a linguistic event, and that now introduces a moment which focuses on a detail of nature and provides an antefact to the subsequent events. The passing of time must be established by some other element in the poem, which can be related to now. In fact, the elliptical sentence in the second last line of the poem, Before, before, seems to function in two ways: as an echo of the preposition indicating place (before my door), which is already emphasized by the reiteration of before, and as an adverbial of time which recalls the now of the beginning and registers the passing of time.

The conjunction and, too, helps to set up a logical connection in the poem, but it can also serve as a link for two or more events: it may express either an internal or external relation. In the first of the two cases in which and occurs, we find that the

sentence and seraphs cluster on the domes cannot be conjoined with the prepositional phrase immediately preceding, that is Before, before, before my door; but, if Before, before, before my door is to be considered as a recurring elliptical clause, a refrain, or an echo, as it were, of a soldier walks before my door of the second line, then the sentence introduced by and could be conjoined with the preceding the hives are heavy with the combs. As for the second and, the clause introduced by it can be freely conjoined with its predecessor. The question is whether and here is cohesive or structural. A cohesive and would establish a sequence in the discourse, and would introduce a sentence as an addition, a better explanation, a further clarification of the preceding statement. A structural and, instead, would simply establish a retrospective relation between all the members of the conjunction. In this poem, the first and can be interpreted as a cohesive conjunction, which shifts the reader's attention from the events taking place before my door to those taking place above the natural world. But it can also express an addition to the sequence of events taking place "before my door", since the refrain recurs just after the two sentences introduced by and. The second and is more clearly structural, since it is freely able to conjoin with its predecessor, and, furthermore, the two clauses are separated by a comma, which does not establish such a definite pause as the full stop does. There are hints that the line before, before, before my door has priority over the two linked clauses: this same line is, in fact, repeated after the sentence introduced by and, so that a symmetrical figure enclosing another symmetrical figure is created. However, the rhyming pair combs/domes might signal the possibility for the two lines to be conjoined creating a more direct link between the events on earth and the events in the supernatural world. It is, therefore, evident that the interpretation of the poem depends on the function of grammatical features, not merely for the meaning of the

line, but for the total comprehension of the poem.

A hint at the theme of time is also given by the qualities of the adjectives in this poem: that grapes are plush and hives are heavy with the combs denotes a particular time of the year; that saints are brilliant in fresh cloaks indicates a renewed condition; that the sunlight is acid can only be referred to a definite period during the day. The contrast with another time is established indirectly.

There are three verbs - used in three subsequent sentences - which indicate a gradual change:

The shadows lessen on the walls: gradual vanishing (of shadows)

The bareness of the house returns: gradual recurrence (of bareness)

An atid sunlight fills the halls: gradual appearing (of sunlight)

These verbs indicate a short duration; but, no "aspect" being shown, the stress is still on the activity itself as taking place in the present time. Yet, again, the sense of the past is felt: lessen, by indicating the change in a natural event: return, by indicating the recurrence or renewal of a condition; fill, in its sense of "pervade", all possess the intrinsic quality of occurring over a span of time. With the shadows lessen on the walls, we have moved from an open space (the space of the seraphs and saints: nouns which, not being preceded by any determiner, are referred to generically) to the environment of a building. The same had happened at the beginning of the poem with a soldier appearing, which defines what is taking place in a particular place, as opposed to what is taking place in the external world, defined in terms of its natural objects. With the two following lines, we are aware that what is being described is still occurring within four walls, whereas after the interruption before, before, we have moved out again; but now the situation is different: a soldier stalks before my door (where stalks by assonating with walks in the second line stresses the changed condition). The situation has

changed, but the tenses have never been involved. All the conditions occur without any direct external intervention, although an external cause is present. In the case of the outside world, new conditions are determined by the passing of time, which is being continuously renewed, yet cannot be materially grasped (the present tense indicates that the past does not matter); events are universal, and do not depend on one another (there are no embedded clauses); qualities belong to entities, and are not considered in their development (no resulting attributes). Agents are not present: events are determined without being explicated. In Blood smears the oaks the agent has already acted on the part affected, and the event has been completed before man has been able to observe it. With this half-line the perspective changes again: after the inner world (the four walls of the mind, the self), which filters the external events through itself and charges them with meaning, it is the external world again which appears, in its irrationality and inconsistency. There is no gradual process here, no dissolving of an event into another, but only a dissection of time into separate moments, where gratuitous acts, like war, happen. There aren't ^{any} reasons why events happen, either: whether it is a biological event that is registered, or a tragic fatality, there is no way in which man can dominate it. At the most, man can feel that he is being affected by (the sunlight originates from an external source), but has no power over, nature: phonologically, the assonances and echoes linking natural and supernatural remain outside the world of the mind, enclosed by the rhyming pair walls/halls; and this feature emphasizes the distinction between the two worlds registered at the semantic level.

The first part of "Contrary Theses" develops in a natural setting (probably a garden), in a neutral time, where all attributes are 'current', existing, and Nature manifests itself in its fullness. The bees dancing above the bee-hives are pragmatically perceived by the reader when the image of the hives is presented, although the bees are not mentioned, and their dance is echoed by the clustering of the seraphs on the domes (bee-hives are, in fact, dome-shaped). The saints, shining in their new clothes, also stress the new look of nature in summertime. A soldier - the only human being - walks. Actions are confined within a place: a soldier walks before my door, seraphs cluster on the domes. The location contains and circumscribes the action, as when, in a picture, certain constituents have a dynamism belonging only to themselves, and not affecting the scene as a whole:



BEES



BEEHIVES

(dance of the bees)

The movement of the bees over the beehives takes place in a circumscribed space, not from one place to another.

In the second part of "Contrary Theses", the location is different (from 'outside' to 'inside'), but the viewpoint is now ambiguous. The observer could be still outside and peep through a window, or have moved inside the house. There are no more 'current' attributes, but a gradual change of the perceptions taking place in the observer's mind. The walls become more and more free from the shadows, the house becomes bare, the halls of the house become full

of an acid sunlight (similar to the artificial light that fights natural darkness and emphasizes contrasts), the oaks are smeared with blood. But the location (walls, house, halls, oaks) is never topicalized: the discourse is constructed by topicalizing the perceptions of the observer, his perception of the shadows, of the bareness, of the light, of the blood producing the stain, followed closely by the perception of the soldier's way of walking, which is not natural, but rather artificial and contrived: stalks contains the comment of the observer.

A Clear Day and No Memories

No soldiers in the scenery,
No thoughts of people now dead,
As they were fifty years ago,
Young and living in a live air,
Young and walking in the sunshine,
Bending in blue dresses to touch something,
Today the mind is not part of the weather.

Today the air is clear of everything.
It has no knowledge except of nothingness
And it flows over us without meanings,
As if none of us had ever been here before
And are not now: in this shallow spectacle,
This invisible activity, this sense.

Wallace Stevens

Though written in January 1955, this poem was published in 1957 in the collection Opus Posthumous. The title establishes the matrix of the poem, namely "the weather is in relationship with time". A clear day, in fact, refers to some natural atmospheric condition, while memories contains a reference to the past time that is negated by no. The title, therefore, shows a link between two elements, which are^{n't} normally related. Their association derives from the grammatical conjoinment of the two NPs through the conjunction and. There are variables in the poem of this matrix: details from the weather-lexicon and details from the time-lexicon: sunshine, air, weather, belonging to the former; now, ago, before, belonging to the latter. The semantic incompatibility is cancelled, and the details fluctuate freely in a new semantic area, going from weather to time. The text owes its unity to the fact that the weather code is translated into the time code; and that the weather / time code of the possible world of the poem is related to the weather / time code of the actual world, the world of the reader.

The reader is in a dialectical relationship with the text: his decoding of the text clashes with his presence in the text. So he realizes that there is a duality in the signs: the grammatical approach, and the ungrammatical approach. Throughout the poem, in fact, there are possible parallel constructs: those with a primary meaning, which is the most plausible within the economy of the poem, and another - or more - secondary meaning(s), which remain in the background, as a presence felt, but not fully revealed. These secondary meanings give the reader a chance to bring forward doubts as to what is being stated in the poem,

and all his doubts are reinforced by the paradoxical nature of the affirmations revealed in the poem - present cancelling past, knowledge of nothingness, our non-existence in the present time - to culminate in this sense, which includes in itself sensation and feeling as well as understanding and signification. It is up to the reader to work out the meanings of the ambiguities, and reconcile them.

The technique by means of which Stevens captures the reader's attention, forcing him to ask various questions, is based upon the device of presenting an ambiguity which is afterwards dissipated only to let a new ambiguity intervene and again be dispersed. The first two lines in the poem are elliptical, being marked by the omission of the main verb. The choice is open as to the tense of the missing verbs: "there are"? "There were"? "I have no thoughts ..."? The choice is also open as to the state of the NPs: subjects? objects? The moment of time defines itself as present only when the subordinate clause is introduced, where a comparison is established between the different periods: now and fifty years ago. Central to the argument is the change of viewpoint in the representation: in the first line it is the presence of the soldiers which is negated, while in the second line no thoughts of people now dead can negate either the essence of the people's thinking, or the people's presence in the observer's mind, depending on the scope of the negation and on the correlation between one element of the main clause and one element of the subordinate clause introduced by as.

Let us consider the possibilities.

┌
No thoughts of people now dead,
└──────────────────┘

As they were

If the negative pro-form No has in its scope only the head noun, then the of-phrase is to be interpreted as a subjective genitive ("people have no thoughts"); if the scope of the pro-form extends up to the end of the line, so that it includes the prepositional phrase as well, then the of-phrase is a specification of the previous NP ("thoughts about people"). The question is whose mind is being considered. This ambivalence also affects the terms of the comparison:

... people now dead, / As they were
┌──────────────────┘

... people now dead, / As they were
┌──────────┘

The absence of a comma after people allows two readings. In one reading they is coreferential with people, thoughts, or thoughts of people, and the postmodifying adjective can be attached to one of these NPs with a parenthetical meaning. In another reading dead is not parenthetical, but specifies an equational comparison between a head noun in the superordinate clause and a head noun in the subordinate clause, head nouns which are contained in two different propositions. In other words, are these people or thoughts, or thoughts of people being looked at as they were fifty years ago? Or, are these people, or thoughts or thoughts of people dead now just as they were fifty years ago? Is it the recipient of the thinking (people) or is it the essence of the thinking itself (thoughts, thoughts of people) that the reader

expects will be defined? Or is it the "manner in which" (as) they were that will be explicated? From the fourth line on the reader is satisfied that dead only applies to a condition observable in the present time, and that the sequence of attributes (young, living, etcetera) - all of them semantically opposed to dead - are modifications of the NP people.

In the course of the reading process the reader of this poem, like any reader, makes choices, by discarding certain meanings that seem implausible, or, instead of rejecting them completely, by keeping them at the back of his mind, ready to produce them when he can make use of them. The meanings which have been left aside in going through this stanza are : a sense of the past in the opening line, the change of perspective from the observer's mind to the people's minds, the equational comparison between present and past. We will return to this later.

The last line of the stanza occupies a central position in the poem, and is also reflected, syntactically and semantically, in the first line of the following stanza. Let us consider the two lines together:

Today the mind is not part of the weather.

Today the air is clear of everything.

The distribution of information here is affected by the position occupied by the adverbial of time, today. It is the first time that a verb in the present tense appears, and, indeed, that a main clause verb appears, since the only other finite clause is subordinate ; yet, the present time has already been contrasted with the past time. Besides, being today in an initial position, it constitutes the "given" element of the sentence, the point of contact between the content of lines 1 - 6 and the last line of the stanza. The "new" information is given by the rest of the line,

as a comment on what is happening today. The opening line of the next stanza establishes coherence relations with the preceding line, mainly on the assumption that

if A is not part of B
then B is clear of A

so that everything is assigned features belonging to mind.

So, the following lexical relations are established:

weather		mind
=		=
air		everything

(= : having some semantic markers in common)

and the coherence relations are:

(time)	,	(individual)	EXCLUSION	(individual)
(time)	,	(individual)	EXCLUSION	(individual)
today		the weather	excludes	the mind
		the air		everything

The individuals in each line exclude each other, but each individual is related to another individual in the other line by similarity:

excluders = weather, air
excluded = mind, everything

A series of relations can now be established, including the title of the poem:

<u>excluder</u>	<u>excluded</u>
a clear day	memories
scenery	soldiers
	thoughts
	people now dead
weather	mind
air	everything

The "excluders" belong to the present world; the "excluded"

belong to the past world. That today receives the focus of the information implies that there was a past when these things did not happen; so, also the relation excluder-excluded pertains only to the present. The semantic areas within which these two categories are inscribed are, respectively:

present time	past time
atmospheric conditions	mental conditions
static sight	activity

What is actual is static, while the embedded recalled and imagined world is dynamic and mental. The present banishes all that is intellectually tangible to leave only the certainty of natural phenomena that are cognizable only by the senses. But what used to happen in the past, when the mind seemingly was part of the weather? It happened that life was guided by both instinct and intelligence, the instinct of living and walking and the purposeful intentional act of bending with a clear purpose. The past was made of actions in progress, always ongoing and never terminated, the result of which is a dynamism that is negated in the present. As a matter of fact, the subordinate clause containing the reference to the past is introduced by a main verb, were, whose predicates are partly adjectival and partly verbal. The nature of the predicates -

young and living in a live air,
 young and walking in the sunshine,
bending in blue dresses

- is strongly dynamic: the condition they refer to is temporary and the class of people that they modify is specific. There is considerable interdependence between the dynamic / static dichotomy in the verb phrase and the specific / generic dichotomy in the noun phrase, as Quirk points out ; besides, the dichotomy temporary / permanent intervenes when, given a specific reference

* I took "dresses" to mean "uniforms" (cfr. p.183) after the gloss in the Webster Dictionary, '2 utilitarian or ornamental covering for specific purpose or occasion (a soldier in battle -)'. A different reading would be that soldiers are not people but thoughts of people - as Anne Cluysenaar pointed out to me. This would change the interpretation of the first stanza considerably.

showing a progressive aspect, it is committed to temporariness:

people walk in the sunshine

(generic reference / simple aspect / habitual)

those people walk in the sunshine

(specific reference / simple aspect / habitual)

those people are walking in the sunshine

(specific reference / progressive aspect / temporary)

Also the clause of purpose, to touch something, refers to a future action, not yet accomplished, and therefore in progress. And, of course, if one thinks that the reference is specifically people, namely soldiers,^{*} there is also a semantic area, containing all "war"-linked lexical items, that remains in the background, but that evokes dynamism, action, a balance between life and death, a target to aim at.

The chain of negations in the second stanza deserves a discussion. Here is the stanza, where the elements with a negative content have been underlined:

Today the air is clear of everything.

It has no knowledge except of nothingness

And it flows over us without meanings,

As if none of us had ever been here before

And are not now: in this shallow spectacle,

This invisible activity, this sense.

Within each line there is a negative/positive play, which is established lexically and semantically, and plays an important role in the pattern of the linguistic, extra-linguistic, and meta-linguistic expectations of the reader. That the air is clear implies that there is no element in it that makes it turbid, so the air is unclouded, limpid, transparent. But clear of everything is also semantically equivalent to "[] containing [] nothing":

	clear of	everything
=	-	everything
=	+	nothing

The next line has the same semantic construction:

	no knowledge except of	nothingness
=	+	nothingness

which has been established by means of an assertion containing a negative element, followed by a prepositional phrase of exception containing another negative element, to reinforce the negation.

The conjoined sentence of the third line completes the symmetry between the opening line of the stanza and the following two:

- everything	=	+ nothing
+ nothingness (and)	-	meanings
- "something"ness	+	no meanings

The flowing of the air takes place, but it carries no meanings [+no meanings]; as in the first stanza, there is a relationship excluder/excluded, namely the air, on one side, which excludes, everything, knowledge, and meanings, on the other side; it includes, however, knowledge of nothingness.

What is going on here for the reader is that a part of the content of the negative lexical items remains outwith the scope of negation. As we have seen, in fact, clear has a positive feature marking the clarity and purity of the atmosphere, and the absence of negative agents such as clouds, mist, etcetera. Knowledge has a factive element, but the factualness is negated to some extent by the following phrase of exception, so that the strength of the proposition it has no knowledge, as a factual assertion, is diminished, and the assertion only creates an expectation that is contradicted by the other half of the split quantified negation (no ... except): therefore the meaning is

it has some knowledge. In the end the negative content of the third line is subverted by means of the two following clauses of manner, which we are going to discuss below. At this point it is useful to stress that the linguistic expectations may sometimes clash with the meta-linguistic expectations of the reader, and a text is produced which means something literally, and something else pragmatically. Logically, in fact, "to know nothing" is the same as "not to know anything"; but if "to know nothing" is to be taken as a statement on the nature of language, then it has to be included within the limits of the coherence of the text, and be discussed with reference to other elements in the discourse. This is also outwith the rules of logic.

The two subordinate clauses introduced by as if raise a number of problems. Let us quote the context:

As if none of us had ever been here before
And are not now: ...

The first problem is related to the negation none which may be interpreted, semantically, as "not" + "some" or as "not" + "all".

The sentence:

a. None of the girls came.

can be the negation of either b or c :

b. Some of the girls came .

c. All the girls came.

The pronoun none is ambiguous in this respect. The second problem concerns the compound subordinator as if , in that it makes the clause function as a comparison and as a hypothesis as well.

However, either of these two functions can prevail, making the sentence work in two different directions. Let us look at the following example:

d. He behaves as if neither of us had ever seen that girl
before.

If the comparison prevails, the stress is on the way in which he behaves, presumably acting in a way one would normally act with a stranger; if the hypothesis prevails, then the modal past had

signals an unreal condition, namely that he is pretending he has never seen the girl, but, in fact, he has! Another problem concerns the semantic relation that holds between probability and expectation. The degree of expectation becomes clear when one appends a qualifying statement to the utterance in question:

... as if neither of us had ever been here before

e. (whereas some of us have)

or

f. (whereas all of us have)

In both cases the appended statement may modify the question, according to the expectations built up in the addressee's mind; but in the following case the expectation is contradicted by the appended statement:

g. (and, in fact, none of us have)

As a matter of fact the "reality" or "unreality" of the hypothesis is not intrinsic in the hypothesis itself, but is a quality of the attitude of the speaker who creates expectations in the reader.

Let us look now at the deletions of the following conjoined clause:

And are not now

= And (as if) (none of us) are not (here) now

Again, there is the problem of the negative pronoun none (negative of "all of us", of "some of us", of "we" ?), associated with the problem of the double negation (none of us ... not), which allows:

h. and (as if) (all of us) are (here) now

i. and (as if) (some of us) are (here) now

j. and (as if) (we) are (here) now

Being a comparison containing a hypothesis, one could expect one of the following qualifying statements:

k. (whereas none of us are)

l. (whereas some of us are)

m. (and, in fact, all of us/we are here now)

It is the m appended statement, this time, which is the least probable and which contradicts the reader's expectation.

In the light of these considerations, let us now examine the conjoined sentences together, looking at both the more probable and the less probable hypotheses:

n. some of us / all of us have been here before and none of us are here now

o. we have never been here before and are here now

It can be noticed that n assumes the presence of people in the past but is not committed to a presence of people in the present (people have existed, but they do not exist); or instead, assumes that people, who do not exist, did not exist in the past. The conclusion should be, perhaps, that people either belong to the past - with no present - or to the present - with no past?

If we consider the experience of the reader, we may conclude that what the poem says may - paradoxically - be the opposite of what the poem means. As the experience of the reading develops, the addressee experiences the past world, whose existence is denied by the title itself and the sequence of negations in the first stanza. So the memories are there, although embedded - grammatically and metaphorically - in the world of the present. What the reader does is perceiving the flow of time in the past as if it was present, as if the past had, in fact, never been consummated, but had remained at the stage of a developing moment (as we can see from the clause of purpose to touch something, an act which hasn't reached its completion). The linguistic features demand that the mind be excluded from the present (= weather). Actually, the mind cannot be pragmatically excluded, because the reader - one of us - is here and his mind is here: he is thinking (versus no thoughts); he is perceiving the presence of the soldiers (versus no soldiers in the scenery); he is interpreting history in the flowing of

time (versus without meanings); he is imposing his presence (versus and are not now). The reader can act on the grammatical contents of the poem, and eradicate its empirical contents from its literal meaning. So, when the reader reaches the point where the as if clause has elicited his expectation "whereas we have been here before", he can automatically extract the deleted subject of his own sentence - we - to fill in the deleted subject of the conjoined sentence:

p. and (as if) (we) are not(here) now

building up a new personal response:

q. (while, in fact, we are here now!)

allowing an interpretation such as:

r. while we have been here before and are here now

(we have existed in the past and exist in the present)

thus bringing together past and present in a continuous duration, which is the concept that the poem - only through its literal meaning - is negating.

The last three phrases of the poem define here as this shallow spectacle, this invisible activity, this sense. Spectacle, activity, and sense are echoes of the scenery of the first stanza, the action of people in the past (the soldiers of the first stanza), or the flowing of the air in the second stanza, and the sensations that are perceived through the poem, or even the very meaning of the poem, respectively:

shallow spectacle recalls scenery (no soldiers,
no thoughts ...)

(shallow, because it is void of dynamic people)

invisible activity recalls (action of) soldiers (in the past)
(invisible, because the past cannot be seen)

invisible activity recalls air ... flows over us
without meanings

(invisible, because the air itself cannot be seen -

although in a clear day visibility is good ! -

or because the perceiver who is there - us - cannot see;
 or because the perceiver is not there, so there are no eyes
 present to see it;
 or because the mind - not being part of the weather -
 is not present, so that there are no sensations that might
 refer to external objects, and the perceiver, as well as his
 mind and his intellect, and his instincts do not belong
 to the actual world)

<u>sense</u>	recalls	sensations and / or
		meanings

In order to explain the impact of this_sense on the reader, one must consider the function of the demonstrative. "This" is a lexical item whose general meaning can be semantically marked as "near reference". By metaphorical extension, "this" connotes interest and familiarity, and it may also signal that a noun phrase is referentially equivalent to a previous noun phrase. All the NPs determined by "this" are near the observer/reader, they are closely identifiable, they are "here". In terms of the reader's response this anticipates something the reader has been involved with throughout the poem. But the substance of the object is progressively diminishing: from the spectacle - although shallow - that can be seen, to the activity - that cannot be seen - to the sense that is pure and abstract perception. By the time the addressee reaches the end the actual world has lost much of its substance. Conversely, if the physical forms are fading, the mental and intellectual matter is getting stronger: from the spectacle - only for the eyes - to the activity - only for the perceiving qualities of the brain - to the sense - that is, the meaning, the quality that can only be perceived by the mind, the intellect. The reader is left free to decide whether this_sense is to be taken as lack of substantial matter, abstraction, negation of a physical presence

of man in time, or as assertion of a meaning in man's life given by the presence of his intellectual power, his mind, which has been excluded from the weather (today the mind is not part of the weather), but which is not excluded from time, as a continuous flowing, where past and present coexist. This sense is the sense of the reader, his bodily faculties, his ability to perceive or feel, his consciousness, his instinct, his wisdom, his logic, his "everything"; but, in the poem, the air is clear of everything. What has happened? Essentially, that the experience of the poem on the reader's part has created a new situation, which is opposed to the literal situation of the poem. During the process of reading the addressee has discovered that weather and time are not one and the same; that the memory of the past does exist; that there are meanings in the present; that there are people in the present with a consciousness of the past. The strategy has been that of saying things to provoke a response which is the exact opposite of the literal meaning of the text, and which is based on the function of the linguistic elements in a specific situation. Throughout the poem the reader is suspended between the two alternatives, that of looking for syntactical exactness, and that of following his instinct : at some point, however, he realizes that his linguistic expectations frustrate him, that what the poem literally says is not what the poem means, that he must use the literal meaning as a metalinguistic tool, as a comment on the ambiguity of language, in order to create a new meaning. All this is possible for the reader, because his very presence contradicts what the poem says. As a matter of fact life and dynamism are only present in embedded sentences, introduced by as or as if (suggested by the image of young people in action, dressed in gorgeous uniforms, and breathing a live air), and therefore only contained in a comparison that is either a thing of the past or a counterfactual statement.

Today, instead, life is unadventurous, unimaginative, uninstinctive, unaesthetic, a life of people who are just ghosts, who do not even exist in the sense of a dynamic existence, a life of a nature which is not in progress (the air flows, not "is flowing", therefore it does not supply the sense of the past or even the present, has no progressive meaning ; and yet is the only dynamic verbused in a present context). On the contrary, the reading experience is duration by definition, is happening in time, is taking place in the present and takes into account also the background knowledge of the addressee; the reading experience is an adventure (like the adventurous soldiers), it is imaginative and aesthetic (because it is a kind of poetic experience), and is actually performed by an addressee who is not only alive, but also active.

Frog Autumn

Summer grows old, cold-blooded mother.
The insects are scant, skinny.
In these palustral homes we only
Croak and wither.

Mornings dissipate in somnolence.
The sun brightens tardily
Among the pithless reeds. Flies fail us.
The fen sickens.

Frost drops even the spider. Clearly
The genius of plenitude
Houses himself elsewhere. Our folk thin
Lamentably.

(Sylvia Plath)

This poem was published in Sylvia Plath's first book of poems, The Colossus, in 1960.

The speech-role in this poem is taken up by the frogs, who lament the end of the summer in first person. But there is also the voice of Sylvia Plath as a person, who writes about the passing of time, and of Sylvia Plath as a poet, who conveys, through the description of the frog autumn, the drying up of the poetic vein. The poem, however, is not about the characters, but about the season (= time): it is a poem about the growing of one season into another, the renewing of life matter, the regeneration of poetry. With the passing of time, all things and creatures in nature undergo a change: time rhythmically enriches and dries up, cools down and heats up, enlightens and darkens, lets grow and lets die. Its power is illimitable and inexhaustible: it affects all things and all creatures, it contains both the positive and negative pole, life and death. While Time moves on, all creatures and things move with Time; but although things and creatures die, the spirit lives on and manifests itself in other creatures and things. Time allows the gradual change of a condition into another, of a mood into another, of a sensation into another. Time also takes on human features, in a universal symbiosis of natural things with animate creatures. But while Time ~~abbreviates~~ life, it also creates life elsewhere. The creation of life is achieved only by going through the stages of gradual vanishing and final death, wherefrom life emerges:

Frost drops even the spider

Frost causes the spider to fall, and, simultaneously, it abandons the spider, even the spider: the spider, the last creator (the web the spider spins, can go on and on, circularly, forever) is dropped by frost. Is that a sign of death? Or is that a sign of regeneration,

following the liberation of the spider-creator from the trap of frost? Isn't the dropping of the spider the sign of a new web to be spun elsewhere?

Let us look at the different stanzas. The poem is divided into three stanzas, each of which develops a stage of time. From the ageing of the season (Summer grows old) in stanza 1, to the discomfiture and wastefulness of a part of the day usually associated with awakeness (Mornings dissipate in somnolence) and the powerlessness of a much too late shining of the sun (The sun brightens tardily), to the coming of winter, bringing death, but also preparing the blooming of springtime (Frost drops even the spider), the poem reproduces the stages of life from the loss of youth till the fading away of life and the springing up of life itself elsewhere, within a different environment.

Semantically, there are similarities between the verbal actions, which may be divided into three different categories indicating:

- change of condition (grow old, croak, wither,
dissipate, sicken, thin)
- non-permanence (only croak, brighten
tardily)
- negative goal-directed
action (fail, drop)

All the verbs, being bare of aspectual marking, have no temporal reference. The present tense is the tense of any period in time, short, long, or eternal that includes the present moment. The present tense is also the tense through which one can give a demonstration or an exemplification. The stress, here, is on the way in which the action is carried out, not on its developing, since addresser and addressee are ambiguously involved in the a-temporal reference to a situation which can only be observed

during a certain period of time. What Plath is conveying is an all-time statement, her set of data being universal referents. The difference between:

a. Summer grows old.

and

b. Summer is growing old.

is the lack of time reference in sentence a; there is, besides, an unconditional acceptance on the speaker's part of the event of sentence a, while sentence b is merely the description of an event in progress. Also

c. We only croak.

is basically different from:

d. We croak.

in that sentence c lets one presuppose that it isn't the real voice of the frogs that is being considered, but their inability to speak: and this is a sign that death is near (the verb "croak" may also, in fact, refer to an expiring grasp, as in:

e. He **croaked** (=He died.)

The stress is, in Plath's lines, on the very moment between life and death.

The goal-directed action expressed by fail can work in two different ways:

= Flies miss us, as in:

Flies fail us f. The **pupil** failed **his test**.

= There are no flies, as in:

g. Words fail me

The semantics of the verb "fail" defies one to use it transitively successfully. So, it becomes appropriate to a situation in which the ability to use language successfully is also challenged.

Through the use of the present tense, and through the use of

verbs indicating a state or condition always altering, Plath has managed to achieve a proverbial verity, an eternal truth, which cannot be contradicted. Genericness, which is conveyed by the absence of article before summer, autumn, mornings and frost, reinforces the sense of proverbial verity. It is not the autumn of the frog that the poet is talking about: it is rather the manner in which changes take place that is presented. It is a poem about changes taking place in time, but the description is carried out outside duration: summer_grows_old is not a reference to a particular summer, and mornings are moments of an unspecified season.

Within this picture taken out of time and conveying the idea of divergence from constancy as well as the effects of that divergence, either a deterministic interpretation of reality, or a sense of acceptance may spring from the different stanzas. In stanza 1 there is a relationship cause-effect concerning the deterioration of time itself and the creatures of Nature:

Time	/CAUSE/	Summer	/TO/	grow old, cold-blooded mother.
(agent)	(process)			(effect)
				the insects are scant, skinny (additional effect)

The overall effect is one of aridity. The cold-blooded mother has lost all power of generating. And this absence of the previous opulence (summer - opulence of nature - ; mother - pregnancy-) has repercussions on the natural world: the insects become few, and the few existing ones have little flesh. Time also affects the frogs:

/TIME/	/CAUSE/	/US/	=	We	/TO/	only croak and wither
(agent)	(process)					(effect)

The agent is not mentioned and the verbs are used intransitively: but both croak and wither are caused by dryness, by absence of water. Water is vital **for** the plants, of which the frogs take on the characteristics (in fact, they wither). So, there is a cause for the events in stanza 1 to happen; only, ^{the cause} is not mentioned specifically: they are caused by the natural order of things.

In stanza 2 it is again time to cause the drowsiness of the early hours of the day, while the brightening of the sun is modified by the only adverbial in the poem which might have a temporal reference. It, in fact, may refer either to the manner in which the sun shines (the brightening takes place 'slowly'); or to the relative time at which the process takes place (the brightening comes late). In this second meaning, there is a presupposition of frustration of expectation. Sentence h contains the presupposition that, had the news come earlier, something might perhaps have been done:

- h. The news came so tardily that it was impossible
to give them any help whatever.

In sentence i, instead, tardily refers to the manner in which something took place:

- i. The old lady moved tardily towards us.

Both meanings of tardily could be appropriate to Plath's lines, but only one interpretation may imply failure to get somewhere in time, and yet it is not a failure that must be presupposed: it may be a failure, but it may also be simply a slow process, not necessarily the delayed realization of an expectation. The ambiguity concerning the idea of failure is also in:

Flies fail us

which may imply an unsuccessful attempt at hitting us, or a frustration of expectation. In the final line of the stanza, The fen sickens, the idea of deterioration expressed at the

beginning is reinforced, both if interpreted transitively (the fen makes one sick), and if interpreted intransitively (the fen becomes sick).

It is in the third stanza that the idea of acceptance overcomes that of a fatalistic interpretation of reality, envisaged in the idea of failure in the previous stanza as a lack of something expected. An idea of regeneration is established in the liberation/death/new life idea contained in the image of the dropping of the spider. Life continues elsewhere, because even failure is never a complete failure. The genius of plenitude brings life elsewhere, even if this can cause the death of our folk, who thin, that is, become less numerous and/or skinny, scant and/or skinny, just as the insects are.

Lexemes in this poem, such as palustral, somnolence, plenitude, lamentably, which sound rather formal and archaic, fit in, better than more colloquial expressions (such as 'marsh', 'sleepy', 'fullness', 'mournfully', and 'slowly', or 'late') with the basic oppositions of the poem, and their archetypal meanings:

DRY / WET

FLESH / BONE

DEATH / LIFE

In particular, the opposition DRY / WET, in the poem, is conveyed by:

skinny (skin becomes dry)	}	DRY
croak (harsh voice)		
wither (dehydration)		
cold-blooded (blood is fluid)	}	WET
palustral (watery land)		
reeds (they live in		
water)		
fen (it has water)		
frost (it's caused by		
cold acting on water)		

The opposition DRY / WET is interlinking with the other basic oppositions listed. In the archetypal interpretation, water suggests regeneration, and dryness indicates aridity, impotence. But water is also associated with impotence in the mythical world, so the two categories can be used in different combinations. The opposition is not DRYness (= bad) / WET, or water (= good); on the contrary, DRYness can be associated with BONE, and it acquires a positive meaning (BONE indicating strength, life); and WATER can be associated with PUTREFACTION, and it acquires a negative meaning (watery lands being the home of mosquitoes bringing malaria and death), and also with lack of bones (the reeds plants with no pith - no marrow, no bone - live in water). Water, moreover, can become less and less, and so things dry up: the process of withering is due, in fact, to progressive absence of water, which causes the ageing of the skin.

The opposition FLESH / BONE is conveyed by:

insects	}	FLESH
spider		
flies		
pithless	}	- BONE

skinny	} loss of flesh	- FLESH
thin		

frog	vertebrate	}	FLESH / BONE
	fleshy		

In the frog the opposition FLESH / BONE reaches its synthesis. The frog, in fact,

is amphibian (it lives both on land and in water);

feeds both on invertebrate insects (without bones) or on small
vertebrate animals (with bones);

croaks , that is, it emits hoarse sounds , which are peculiar
of a dry throat (the expression 'to have a frog in the
throat' refers to a throat condition producing hoarseness);

is smooth-skinned (its body is fleshy, hydrated);

is vertebrate (it has a spinal column).

The opposition DEATH / LIFE is conveyed by:

old (alive, but approaching death)

cold-blooded mother (who has given life,
but no longer capable of generating)

scant (not numerous - probably some are
dead)

skinny (indicates loss of weight, of flesh)

wither (a feature of old age, approaching
death)

somnolence (half-way between awakesness and
sleep - sleep, a status similar to death)

tardily (late and slow, but also a manner typical
of old age)

sicken (make or become sick - partial loss
of vitality)

thin (diminish, because some die, or lose
weight, or lose flesh)

spider (creating web with infinite possibilities
of being spun)

genius of plenitude

LIFE / DEATH

} LIFE

There is no definite opposition LIFE / DEATH : the whole situation is precarious, because of a sense of illness, sickness, ageing of the body, decaying of natural elements, death (Our folk thin lamentably). The genius of plenitude, then, goes elsewhere: life (plenitude is opposed to all that is empty, like the pithless reeds, or the insects with no bones, no marrow) escapes.

The main opposition DRY / WET is reflected in the structure of the poem: water, as shapeless and unshaped, but taking shape when coming into contact with something is always changing and never fixed. This ever-changing condition is reflected by the quality of the verbs, suggesting a transitory condition. The poem is fluid in its semantic structure : animate and non-animate are fused in the lexicon used (the somnolence in which mornings dissipate is a human property; the sun shines tardily in the same way in which a person would walk ; the fen gives symptoms of illness like food could do to a human creature; summer grows old and ; has an apposition, mother, as if it was a living creature), and metamorphoses are continuously taking place. The summer is changed into a cold-blooded mother, animals are changed into old, withered creatures, the land becomes a sick land, mornings change into drowsiness. Creatures can even be transformed into something beyond the limits of their own species.

The language of the poem is so fluid as to allow all these changes, so it can be paralleled by water. Dryness, as essential matter, is reflected in the straightforward syntax of the poem: there are no embedded sentences, but there is a complexity brought about by the peculiar nature of verbs, nouns, and adverbs. There is seldom a relationship between subject and object - and when there is a transitive relationship, it is in ambiguous circumstances (Flies fail us; Frost drops even the spider) - and there is never a relationship of the adverb with the whole sentence. Each syntactical element has a very limited scope, and plays an

essential role in its environment, as well as lay ground for associations in the paradigmatic structure.

The ambiguity concerning the time in this poem also concerns the way of making poetry. The poem is there as a moment in time, with its capacity of taking up different shapes by means of its language, highly organized, highly compressed, and deeply symbolical. There is a direct relationship between the semantics of the verbs in the poem and the poem itself. But there is also a relationship between Time and Poetry : the abstractness of Time corresponds to the spirituality of the genius of plenitude (the genius of Poetry) , and, as the transformations and changes of condition in the world are moments of a superior Time, the fluidity of the poem, in its symbolical suggestions and self-shaping language, is one concretization of Poetry. Time can make Sylvia Plath's poetry a frog in autumn : the musical quality of her poetry is turned into a 'croak', it becomes dry (Flies fail us suggests: 'words fail us'), its power of creating vanishes (Frost drops even the spider). All this takes place outside Time, as a fatal event like death (Our folk - all poets? - thin lamentably), but the genius of plenitude (Poetry with a capital P) lives on. The poem does what it says: it mourns death, but it accepts it, and, in accepting it, it creates life.

Childless Woman

The womb
Rattles its pod, the moon
Discharges itself from the tree with
nowhere to go.

My landscape is a hand with no lines,
The roads bunched to a knot,
The knot myself,

Myself the rose you achieve -
This body,
This ivory

Ungodly as a child's shriek.
Spiderlike, I spin mirrors,
Loyal to my image,

Uttering nothing but blood -
Taste it, dark red!
And my forest

My funeral,
And this hill and this
Gleaming with the mouths of corpses.

Sylvia Plath

"Childless Woman" was published in Winter Trees (1971) but it was written shortly before Sylvia Plath's death (February 1963). The ambiguity of this poem reveals itself in the balance between textuality and meta-textuality, between the impossibility of giving birth to a child and the ability to create a poetic text. The poem is an act of despair and a negation of procreation, but it ^{is} also a mode of creating a poem. The poem itself is the referent of the poem as sign. It is a sign for the act of being composed. Sterility and creation, failure to procreate and fecundity fill the poem, which is a product of Sylvia Plath as a woman and Sylvia Plath as a poet. The reader follows the road to the final failure, by accompanying the woman through the description of her body, to the actual copulation, to the miscarriage, to the final nightmare. The discourse about sterility is the delivered creature. The text is a paradoxical meta-text.

The frame of reference is supplied by the knowledge of the female biological function. The vocabulary takes on physiological implications (discharge, blood ... dark red), sexual ones (womb ... pod, rose you achieve), somatic ones (landscape, roads ... knot, ivory, forest, hill). It is the code itself that, in its traditional associations, supplies the connections; and the reader responds to the text by finding such connections in his own code.

The syntax in the first stanza is straightforward; but from the second stanza onward it becomes more and more elliptical, while the lexical material, from the evocation of a large view (landscape) moves to the intricacy of the roads (the roads bunched to a knot),

and finally focuses upon a detail (the_rose), just before providing a comparison between the virginal body and the child's_shriek. In the fourth stanza, syntactically complex owing to the ambiguity of the particular types of embedding continuing into the next stanza, the vocabulary suggests a deeper and deeper "embedding" of images, due to the effect of mirrors reflecting into one another. The semantic inconsistency of a phrase like uttering_nothing_but_blood is the same inconsistency of the following line Taste_it,_dark_red! The lurid invitation to taste blood and, moreover, to perceive it, in some way, as dark red, can only be an imperative dictated by madness, insanity, despair. And it is the confusion of mind that leads the woman to see her own womb as a burial tomb, and her breasts as suckling dead creatures. And yet, there is a sense in madness: the imagery is natural, and the language is made cohesive by the absence of punctuation between forest and funeral (which rules out the listing), and by the absence of cataphorical reference after this, which, in this way, fuses with the following -ing form which can be read either as a nominal or as a reduction of a restrictive relative clause.

There are cohesive relationships set up in the poem that regulate the formal organization of the text; such cohesive relations are matched by coherent relationships that inscribe the situation within a cohesive and coherent whole. In the first stanza the comma plays a decisive role:

The womb	rattles	its pod ,	
the moon	discharges	itself	from the tree
			with nowhere to go.

The comma establishes a comparison; its meaning could be "in the same way as ...". There is a relationship of coreference between womb and its_pod, between moon and itself. But another relationship is established between womb and moon, both agents as well as causers

of the action induced by the following verbs. The noise of the rattling and the force impressed upon the moon are factors external to the womb or the moon, although the noise takes place in the womb, and the force seems to be that of the moon itself. Moreover, the womb can only rattle if its fruit is dry, and the moon disentangles itself from the cage - the branches of the tree - in which it is caught only when the earth turns round and abandons it. But the pod and the moon are eventually abandoned (discharged) by their "containers" or, in a more figurative sense, by their mothers (the pod by the woman, and the moon by the mother-earth). There is nowhere to go for the moon, but there is nowhere to go for the fruit ^(= pod) of the womb either. The situation presented is that of a jump into nowhere, a lack of destination, an act of a superior force on the world which is aimless. There is no direction for the fruit of the discharge, because the event takes place without a mover. Or better, the mover does exist, but it is as if it was not involved in the event. As a matter of fact, both the woman (who surely possesses the womb) and the earth (who traditionally performs the role of mother) are kept outside the event: womb is not preceded by the possessive pronoun - which, however, is often the case with parts of the body in English, unless they are being considered abstractly, or when referring to the NP of the verb phrase, as in:

- a. The brain is responsible for pain.
- b. She took him by the hand.
- c. My knee is sore.

A case relation holds in the poem between the womb (either the agent or the instrument) and its pod (the goal), which, in addition, are possessively related. The resulting figure is that of a closed shape, having an effect only upon itself. In the

following image - that of the moon - the_moon has the same semantic role as the_womb, and the force that moves it is absent:

woman	(moves and makes	womb	(moves)	pod
	her body move)			

earth	(moves and lets it	moon	(moves)	itself
	look as if it was			
	moving)			

From the second stanza onward the tone becomes more personal, intimate, the function of the language being mostly emotive, with an intensive use of the possessive my and of the demonstrative this. The function of this in denoting a near reference can be extended to imply a sense of involvement, interest and intimacy, as in:

d. I'm very fond of this little ring of mine.

as opposed to:

e. Here is that awful box you bought yesterday.

So, there is an anaphoric relation between this_body, this_ivory and myself; and there is also a cataphoric relation between my landscape and myself. Let us see how these relationships establish themselves. The introductory line of the second stanza:

My landscape is a hand with no lines

builds up an expectation in the reader, to the effect that there is nothing on the hand. But this legitimate expectation, based on the use of no instead of "/without/ any" is contradicted by the following line. One can plausibly expect a contrastive "but with ..." after an expression like "without any", whereas one would rather expect "at all" after an expression like "with no ...", as in the following examples:

f. He is a man with no friends (at all).

but:

g. He is a man without any friends, but with a lot of acquaintances.

With

The roads bunched to a knot
one realizes that there is something! The roads (lines) are there;
only they are grouped together so as to make a knot picture. Further
on one reads:

The knot myself,
and in the following stanza:

Myself the rose you achieve -
So the knot is bound to become a rose (from "shut" to "open"), so
that you (presumed lover/husband) can get at it. What the reader
perceives here is a strategy of progressive clarification, as
the syntax becomes more and more elliptical. The reader knows
that the landscape line preludes a further assertion, but he
expects an assertion of blankness; instead, the negation of life
culminates in the opening of the self to the lover's embrace.
Instead of absence of life, the reader finds an erotic embrace,
a pulsing body, although an ivory, a virginal body, a body which
hasn't yet been able to conceive a human life. But before the
sentence is concluded, a new comparison is introduced, which
links up the second and third stanza with the fourth one. The
comparison is:

this body,
this ivory

Ungodly as a child's shriek.

The blind, instinctual forces of the child's shriek evoke the
woman's (or rather her body's) blind, instinctual wish for
fertilization. The strategy of the addresser here is not only
that of gradually contradicting the expectations, but also of
creating an unexpected comparison, that of a body unable to

give birth to a child with a sound emitted by a child, which creates dramatic irony.

In the first stanza the reader had been given the freedom to supply his own terms of comparison, by means of the conventional associations provided by his own background knowledge; this had been made possible through the use of the comma between the two equivalences, a comma which does not compel a co-referentiality, but leaves the reader free to decide for himself. At this point in the poem, which is half-way through the whole lyric, it is the poet who supplies her own personal viewpoint. The woman wants to show how she feels being childless, and compares her own body with a child's shriek. The dramatic irony, carefully prepared though drawing the reader, strategically and gently, toward the woman's condition, in its intricacies and absurdity, culminates in this comparison. The reader is carefully led through the landscape of the woman's body to discover the paradox in her life: the act of copulation that normally leads to procreation does not, in fact, produce any life.

What the woman does follows the description of what the woman is. What she does and what she is are brought together in the picture of the spider. Spiderlike, separated by a comma from the main clause, could be both a premodifier to I, and a sentence modifier:

h. Like a spider, I can spin a canvas.

i. In a spiderlike way, I can spin a canvas.

Sentence h stresses the similarity between what I am and what the spider is; sentence i stresses the similarity between what I do and what the spider does. After the main clause I spin mirrors, a postmodification of either I, or mirrors, follows:

Spiderlike, I spin mirrors,

Loyal to my image

which could be:

j. I, who am loyal to my own image, spin mirrors.

k. I spin mirrors, and these mirrors are loyal to my own image.

Sentence j evokes the image of the woman who is loyal to the image that she has of herself, and therefore can't do anything but remain herself within a sort of self-encircling chain; sentence k evokes the image of the woman who produces images, which reproduce the images other people have of her. My_image can, in fact, be analysed as deriving from "the image of me", or from "the image other people have of me", the former being a genitive objective, the latter a genitive subjective. The ambiguity of the grammatical functions here enriches the meanings and contributes to the building up of the dramatic irony. The multiplying of images in all possible arrangements take place as in a web, which can be woven ad infinitum, and can also get entangled in its design. The mirrors, which are spun, produce the effect of images infinitely multiplying themselves, imprisoning one another, and always reproducing the same image; all this recalling the labouring activity of the spider and its web. The result of this creation - whether it be the image of me or the image that I have produced - is nothing but blood. In the development of the poem the spinning is perceived as the failure to create, and blood as the abortive result of this failure. Therefore, while "spinning" loses the conventional connections with structure, pattern, to become a sterile process, blood loses the conventional connections with life to become the equivalent of miscarriage, sterility: while the reader is reading about a process of creation, he is in fact reading about a sterile process which leads to an abortive attempt to procreate; at the same time the poem is a creation about the failure to create.

After the impersonal tone of the first stanza, the viewpoint keeps changing with the changing of the functions of the language: from referential, it becomes emotive, then conative; and the direction accompanies the development from abstractness to the concrete embrace between the two. There is a sense of change of direction which manifests itself throughout the poem:

from the chaotic sound-movement of the rattling
 to the indefinite movement "away from" with a
 negative goal (nowhere)
 to the absence of directions of the bare hands
 to the converging directions of the roads into a point
 to ^{the} opening movements of the petals of the rose
 to the inarticulateness of the sound of the child's shriek
 which is the counterpart of the confusion of movements
 and directions
 to a new profusion of images and directions following the
 web image
 to the final discharge of blood, as a continuous flow
 away from the body.

After this, an imperative:

Taste it, dark red!

which sounds like an invitation to the you of the poem to taste her blood, in a cry of despair at the sight of the new flow of blood she produces, which, marking the return of the menstrual cycle, means that no fertilization has taken place. In the despair, a confusion of sensations (utter (emit voice), blood (visual and material), taste (absorb flavour), red (visual, colour)) takes place in the reader's mind, and a fusion of sensations and processes goes on also in the reader's mind. She's out of her mind, because she can't conceive, and she asks

her lover to taste all that is part of her landscape :

it blood, which is dark red

and my forest

that is my funeral

and this hill

and this

The female organ that becomes the burial ground for the dry pod (the egg that has not been fertilized and is being expelled) is associated with funeral, the ceremony for the death of the egg, and the consequent flowing of the blood out of the uterus; the hills - her breasts which will not suckle a child - could suckle the mouths of unborn children (corpses).

The imperative is the last finite verb, and all the NPs that follow are objects to it. Plath is considering her own landscape here, involving her lover in looking for the effects of their failed attempt to procreate. She invites him to participate in the ceremony for the loss of the rattling pod (the female egg that has not been fecundated), as in a pagan ritual. The funeral is taking place in the forest of her body; and it is through this forest that the dead creature is carried, while further up on the hills (the woman's breasts) the mouths of the unborn - or miscarried - children glow. The breasts will not be able to suckle a real child, they can only suckle mouths of corpses: this is conveyed through the picture of a magic ritual taking place on a hilly landscape where the only streak of light is perceived in the mouths of dead bodies. The dramatic situation here reaches its climax: the vain attempt of the childless woman to become pregnant is metaphorically conveyed by the ironical picture of her breasts feeding dead children.

Water

It was a Maine lobster town -
each morning boatloads of hands
pushed off for granite
quarries on the islands,

and left dozens of bleak
white frame houses stuck
like oyster shells
on a hill of rock,

and below us, the sea lapped
the raw little match-stick
mazes of a weir,
where the fish for bait were trapped.

Remember? We sat on a slab of rock.
From this distance in time,
it seems like the color
of iris, rotting and turning purpler,

but it was only
the usual gray rock
turning the usual green
when drenched by the sea.

The sea drenched the rock
at our feet all day,
and kept tearing away
flake after flake.

One night you dreamed
you were a mermaid clinging to a wharf-pile,
and trying to pull
off the barnacles with your hands.

We wished our two souls
might return like gulls
to the rock. In the end
the water was too cold for us.

Robert Lowell

This poem, belonging to the collection For the Union Dead, published in 1961, is not only a recollection of a situation in the past; it is also an invitation to recollect, that is, the accomplishment of a social act, the product of an interaction between addresser and addressee. The poem is also a mode of creating a recollection, as this takes place in the mind, either as a voluntary or as an accidental recalling to the mind. So, the recollection is a description, an invitation and an act of recollecting (and reminding). The state of being remembered, the mode of remembering, and the act of remembering are the referents of the poem as sign. Through this sign the writer communicates to the reader his awareness of the past and his idealization of the past when filtered through the present time.

The title of the poem, "Water", is only picked up again in the last line; but it is present throughout the poem as the basic element by means of numerous semantic associations:

water

lobster
boatloads
islands
oyster shells
weir
fish
rock ... drenched by the sea
mermaid
wharf-pile
barnacles
gulls

The symbolic associations this basic element creates throughout the poem will be accounted for later. Meanwhile, let us point out how this element, being liquid, is shapeless, and, simultaneously,

can take on the shape of any solid matter it comes into contact with. It is, in fact, unshaped yet shaping; it is colourless, but able to reflect colours; it changes according to the light and to atmospheric factors; and it can change the shape of objects by wearing them down little by little.

In the reader's mind the poem develops also as a discourse on the act of composing a situation, through its own self-shaping. As the situation is being presented, the reader meditates on "how" this situation is presented to him, and discovers the strategy employed by the author to give shape to something - a recollection - which is, by definition, shapeless: the objects of the flux of the mind are, in fact, organized within a rigorously constructed pattern, with a shifting taking place from one viewpoint to another, and from one temporal level to another. Memory thus acquires the power to create, and the reader can make up his own composition, by being directly involved in this act of composing. The ambiguity of the situation consists in the fact of its being both a situation and a discourse on the building up of a situation, a meta-text.

For a situation to be presented, a possible world must be given, existing at a given time⁷. In this poem, the possible world is identified with the town in Maine, and the time is past. Within this world, moreover, one can include a combination of circumstances or events, seen from a relative viewpoint. The relations within this world are specified by what follows: a frequency relation is established between an agent (boatloads of hands) and a goal (granite quarries), and between the same agent and an affected participant. The viewpoint is that of the agent, specified metonymically as a part of the human body (hands) - in the actual world specified as the instrument -, which does the pushing and the leaving. Hands can be interpreted both as a pars pro toto figure of speech (hands as part of miners, or sailors), and as a body part, the

only part of the men which is leaving every morning, while the rest of them remains inside the houses on the hilly rock. The conjunction and joins together the two actions and maintains the viewpoint, being a cohesive element. The and of the third stanza, instead, makes the perspective change from hands to us. A location relation is, in fact, established between the individuals who participate in the situation and, in a downward direction, the sea as well as what is happening below the surface of the sea. The viewpoint is now that of the addresser, in his recollection, and of the person who is with him. The and, therefore, is coherent, in that it structurally relates the situation of the hands aboard the boat, and that of the people remaining on land. With the question Remember? an addressee is introduced and the situation changes, because the time changes.

The viewpoint changes too:

from impersonal (boatloads of hands)
to personal (below us)
to interpersonal (Remember?)

The interaction is not only between:

Addresser and Addressee (= Reader)

but between:

$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Addresser} \\ \text{and} \\ \text{Addressee} \end{array} \right\}$ and Addressee (= Reader)

At this moment the act of recollecting becomes also an act of reminding. And also, from a perhaps involuntary recalling to the mind, it becomes an effortful and voluntary reconstruction of the past, filtered through the awareness of the present. What follows is a comparison between the situation of a possible world and the same situation as is apprehended in a different time, and therefore a new situation. The relation past/present is parallel to the relation be/seem; obeying coherence principles, a counterfactual

world is introduced - the world of "seem" and of the present time - where the iris-purple colour is the counterpart of the gray-green colour. There is a symmetrical relation between these two worlds, since it is an individual in one world who has access to another world; only, truth conditions are not the same in both worlds. There is an unexpected contrast between the possible world of the present and the possible world of the past. The viewpoint is in both cases the addresser's, but he is no longer only supplying a comment to an event or state of affairs; he is intensely and personally participating in the situation. He is noting not only the colour of the objects, but the way in which the colours change (the color/ of iris, rotting and turning purpler), and he also universalizes his own apprehension of colours by defining them within normality (the usual grey rock/turning the usual green). The addresser does not merely inform the addressee now; he's seeking participation, sympathy, or at least, he's trying to share his experience with somebody else. Of course, while he's sharing his experience with his addressee in life, he's also sharing it with his reader, the addressee of the poem.

The link with the past is coherently established by reversing the passive sentence

[rock] when drenched by the sea

into the active

the sea drenched the rock

and going back to the locative relation of the third stanza between us (but in this case, it is our feet) and the sea. The viewpoint returns to the past, and the direction becomes once again downwards. The trapping sea becomes here the destroying sea: and all is happening within the observer's perspective.

In the last two stanzas we find two embedded situations, one containing a dream, and another containingⁱⁿ a wish. These are two recalled and imagined worlds that are introduced within a recalled

world, as in the fabula in fabula pattern. The new worlds are accessible to the old one by a relation of imagination. In fact the contents of such worlds are recollections of the recollection. These two worlds must be considered as coherently related by the concept of freeing which is associated with the removal of the barnacles and the concept of being free, which is linked with the life of the gulls. The last stanza contains the modal verb might referring to the possibility of something taking place: a possible world is introduced that has very different properties from the actual world; it has features of the metaphysical world, a world that is beyond the physical and the experiential. Perhaps, as is the case in dreams, a subconscious world? And, in fact, the viewpoint here is the viewpoint of the addressee picturing herself in a dream, or the viewpoint of the observer himself as he - with his companion - sees himself in the imaginary situation they have created.⁸

To see the poem as an act of constructing a situation, the reader must be so involved in the situation itself as to become a participant^{ci} in the discourse. In his reading activity, the reader constructs hypotheses on the text and makes abductions about the coherence of each successive proposition during the process of reading. This happens, of course, in the flow of time, the reading time, not the situational time. His time, therefore, being different from the time of the addresser, he's bound to perform a different act from the act that the addresser has performed in writing the poem. And in fact, while the strategy of composition consists in a situation developing logically and coherently, as the analysis has shown, the reader is challenged to find the same coherence in the precariousness of a time, which dissects people, changes the colours of things, shows the futility of dreams.

As the reader approaches the poem he is put straight into the situational context within which relationships of various kinds

may be latent. The it of the first sentence could be an anticipatory element of the kind of it in the following sentences:

a. It was a Maine lobster town that we wanted to settle in.

b. It was a Maine lobster town the town we were talking about.
and as a non-textual element, that is an exophoric reference to the situational context, as in:

c. It was a clear October day. We were walking along the river ...

A dash after town does not rule out any of these interpretations, as a full stop or semi-colon, instead, would do, because the sentence could go on, after a brief incidental comment in the former case. The simple past, besides, does not only create the time reference, but also indicates the time at which the sentence was valid. The reader, therefore, may wonder: does the town still exist? Has the town changed? Is the town still the same? The possibilities are varied; here are some of them:

d. It was a Maine lobster town - now, it's been destroyed.

e. It was a Maine lobster town - now, it's changed.

f. It was a Maine lobster town - actually, it still is, but
it is also an industrial town.

Such comments concern the validity of the sentence in the present time. The use of the past tense concerns not only events that have taken place in the past, but may also let one presuppose a change in the state of affairs in the present time.

The information structure of the first three stanzas provides a topic (a lobster town in Maine), which is the container of the events and objects used to comment upon the main topic. Within the comment, however, new situations, which may be called micro-situations, are created according to the same relationships - container/contents - of the macro-situation. In the boats, in fact, one can see human hands; the empty houses, instead, like the empty sea-shells have been deprived of their inhabitants (the relation is, here, negative); the weir is, somehow, the trap for catching fish;

and the sea is the container of the weir. To this relationship, one may add the whole-part relationship of the absent human body and its hands, which could be the counterpart of the world and the town in Maine. The hands stick out from the body and are given emphasis, since they are the parts of the body that perform the action of detaching the boat from the quay and which extract the raw material from the quarries.

It is the relationship forming the links within the possible world that the reader discovers, step by step, as he responds to what he has already read and to what he's reading at each moment of the reading process. So, while he follows the ordering of representation, he doesn't only record the information being transmitted to him, but he also registers the purposes of the addresser and constructs his own discourse. The relations of the opening stanza convey the idea of a circumscribed 'freedom of movement: the freedom of the people only to go to the islands and return to their town, momentarily left bare, a short trip between bleak white houses and gray granite quarries. This only apparent freedom is coherently related to the mazes of the underwater world, out of which the fish cannot escape, because they are caught in a trap.

With the fourth stanza the whole recollection is apprehended in its entirety and becomes a given for the new comment of the addresser: it is the juxtaposition of colours that creates the contrast between the situation as it was and the situation as it looks now. But isn't it an effect of the mind to change the appearances of things? So, the mind acquires the same power as the water has : the power of shaping things and yet of perceiving them as shaped, the power of reflecting things and so of changing their appearance, the power of making events in the past relive themselves, according to a new optics, in the present; the power of making something usual and commonplace become unusual and unexpected.

After the discovery of the situation remembered, the act of remembering it through a social exchange with an addressee, and the mode of remembering it according to the pattern of relations it builds, the addressee can perceive the image of gradual destruction as an imperceptible act in the past time. He can now discover new relations: the separation of hands from their bodies looks now like a schizoid disconnection within the human mind; the separation of the oyster shells from their inhabitants, to be placed in an alien landscape, and the unnatural separation of the fish from their natural habitat to become food for their own species - all this has been happening, as for the rock, flake after flake.

The two central stanzas are constructed upon a syntactic-semantic contrast. The adversative but, in fact, introduces a relation which is 'contrary to expectation', expectation that may have been raised either by the situation itself, or by the pathos forged by the addresser/addressee interaction in its progress to their point.⁹ The source of the expectation can, in fact, be found either in the appearance of things when a certain time has past ('because it's now a long time since we were sitting there, things seem different; yet they are quite commonplace'); or - an addressee having been introduced within the poem - the source of expectation can be located in the communication process between the speaker and the hearer ('I'm trying to make you see that what you think now about past events and situations is misleading, since these were, in fact, quite commonplace situations'). So, the proposition is either an interpretation of the mental ability to transform things, or an invitation to the partner not to be misled by only apparent evidence. Besides, what is unexpected is not the hallucinatory colour of the rock taking on a stronger hue; but - quite unexpectedly - it is the commonplace gray turning into green colouring of the rock that constitutes the presupposition of the adversative remark. The reader

then becomes aware of the awareness of the addresser, that what looks only usual and commonplace, in fact, disguises the underwater movement leading to terrible effects.

The image of the dream corroborates the reading of but as an internal cohesive aspect of the sequence seem/be. Within this dream-situation there is also an effort to change things: whereas in one possible world the houses were stuck like oyster shells, for instance, the barnacles now have been made free. This effort is going to prove sterile, because it doesn't belong to reality, but to the dream world of the addressee participating in the situation. The only available freedom resides in the world after death, when a symbiosis could take place between the soul and the gull, in a sort of combination of the spiritual and the physical. The realization of this after-death attitude is expressed through a double modality, that of volition and that of possibility. So the possibility of the event taking place is modulated by very faint probability that the object of the wish will become true, on the part of the addresser and on the part of the addressee. Conversely, the final statement In the end/the water was too cold for us presents the act of perceiving a bodily sensation as it was perceived in the past. This realistic detail is an attribute of the water itself, which is mentioned for the first time in the text, apart from its deployment in the poem's title, and comes at the close of the poem. We can notice that this perception remains as it is, it does not change because the time has changed (as, on the other hand, the perception of colours does). The water is the vehicle for transmitting relationships, recollections, feelings of imprisonment, feelings of freedom, for conveying modes of destruction, modes of liberation, for shaping thoughts and for creating new images within the subconscious world; it is the spectrum through which reality is filtered, through which possible worlds turn into different possible worlds where the values assigned to

the objects change. But the physical perception of the water remains.

Part 3

Intertextuality

A text, then, as I hope I have shown, is made up not only of its own structures, stylistic features, verbal material, but also of fragments of other texts, of its writer's strategies and its reader's responses, of the encyclopedic knowledge of writer, reader, and all potential readers. Within a text other texts, or fragment of other texts, play a role and become functional: there is, in fact, an intertextual space that has nothing to do with matters of a writer's influence upon another and that involves material coming from other texts. This material is not necessarily physically present in the new text; it is, instead, often latent and may be the product of a recollection or even a transformation and re-elaboration of a fragment of a text. When a reader reads a text he has a power of control over the language that entitles him to exclude certain linguistic possibilities, but he also has a power of control over the extra-linguistic reality that is a product of his culture. The larger his culture, the more exclusions and inclusions, predictions, confirmations or corrections he might have to make. This process takes place and develops in time, a time that is never definite, and that could actually go on indefinitely. The reader would approach a text, make his predictions, dwell upon a single segment, confirm certain ideas, go back to some past element, correct his predictions, or indeed multiply them as long as the text unfolds itself and even afterwards. There is no definite intertextual space, and there

is no time to cover it. When the text is read, it is de-temporalized.

Semiotically a text is approached according to "translinguistic" practices, that is, as J.Kristeva puts it, semiotic practices that "operate through and across language, while remaining irreducible to its categories as they are presently assigned" (Kristeva 1980:36). She goes on to argue that

In this perspective, the text is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communication speech, which aims to inform directly, to different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances. The text is therefore a productivity, and this means: first that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (ibidem: 36)

Intertextuality involves the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another system of signs, something that is done within a social framework. The temporal factor, instead, lets its meaningful values flow into history through the reader's ability to de-construct a text, reconstruct it and, through this de-temporalized practice, assign it a historical dimension.

The intertextual space is the locus where poetry arises; poetry, in fact, is indirect statement, no matter how simple and common its language might be. By means of simple words, as we have seen in discussing W.C. Williams's "This is Just to Say", a poet can say one thing and mean another. It is the way in which this is done that makes poetry. It is also the way in which the reader places himself in his dialectic relationship with the text that makes poetry, and this dialectic relationship has an infinite potentiality.

When a reader deconstructs a text, he looks for all its implicit or possible constituents even outside the writer's intentions, and tries to determine not what is under the surface of the text, but what is under further layers under the surface of the text, what is dissimulated under the very deepest layer below the surface of the text. Harold Bloom (1976), in speaking of deconstruction in the "Coda" to Wallace Stevens. The Poems of Our Climate, says:

To deconstruct a poem would mean to uncover whatever its rhetoricity conveyed, even if the poem, the poet, and the tradition of its interpretation showed no overt awareness of what implicitly was revealed by such word-consciousness... To deconstruct a poem is to indicate the precise location of its figuration of doubt, its uncertain notice of that limit where persuasion yields to a dance or interplay of tropes. ... "Deconstruction" is reading, but this is Over-reading, or the reading of an Over-Man, who knows simultaneously how to fulfill and to transcend

the text, or rather how to make the text expose the aporia between its self-fulfillment and its self-transcendence. For Over-reader we could substitute "analytical or conceptual rhetorician" or simply "philosopher of rhetoric" (ibidem: 385-386).

Bloom feels the need for a diachronic rhetoric (ibidem:388) to be able to locate what, in a poem, is not properly linguistic and is rather awareness of its limits as text, of its status as rhetoricity. All this has to do with the negative moment in a poem, the moment of crisis, the idea of poetic crossing to be inscribed within a theory of lyric poetry.

Poetic crossings are, in Bloom's conception, negative moments, crisis-points or turning points indicating the text's awareness of its limit as text, its own kind of rhetoricity, its intertropical movement. Tropes, to Bloom, do not exist as such; it is the concept of trope that exists, that is the way in which the will has translated itself into a verbal act, or, alternatively, the way in which the will has failed to translate itself into a verbal act. Poetic crossings, therefore, are mental dilemmas - not acts of knowledge but acts of will - constructed upon the conjunctive-disjunctive movements of the tropes. H.Bloom develops his theory taking as an example W. Stevens's poetry, whose rhetoric is balanced upon a syntax which affirms and a grammar which is conditional and reductive. In my analysis of A Clear Day and No Memories I have pointed out the ambiguity of the poem's syntactical/grammatical system which itself becomes - as the poem unfolds itself - the subject-matter of the poem.

Harold Bloom's poetic crossings, or negative moments, have a crucial function in all post-romantic poetry (and Stevens is one of the main representatives of this poetry) as a non-conventional form of expression aiming at a self-definition, a self-fulfillment and a self-transcendence, and carrying the load of failure as well as boasting off the freedom of experimenting and the achievement of a changed manner of making poetry that could express the twentieth century.

Within the intertextual space, we were saying, poetry arises. Modern poetry arises when all the previous texts or fragments of texts are absorbed and/or destroyed or annulled; modern twentieth century American poetry arose not by destroying conventions, but by using them in new texts, where all the previous utterances could cross and neutralize each other, or function in a new way. The temporal levels, or, I should say, the historical levels may all be present at once, conveying towards the modern age, as they are in The Waste Land, where the modern age is recaptured through myth through an epic-dramatic-lyric structure. But the temporal levels in a poem which makes up a lyric unit in its own right, a poem, that is, that has either been conceived as one, or has been later extracted from its main body and granted an individual status (as "The Descent" by W.C. Williams, taken from Paterson and published as a poem in its own right), or even made into a unit by the reader himself having been acknowledged as an independent work, the temporal levels in such lyric text are intensively, not extensively, present: time is given as a synthesis that is up

to the reader to analyse, extend and perceive, to arrive at a reconstruction of the poem in his own mind in order to recapture the moment of its existence. The lyrism of Pound's image:

The apparition of those faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

lies also in its being temporally compressed; yet its compression can only be recaptured after the deconstructive process, at one of the successive reading acts, or perhaps never totally again.

Poetic language, as a code containing the infinite potentialities of the language, is a system within which one may isolate features of the common language, of the meta-language (as a code whereby one can speak of language through language), and of the semiotic reality. In a lyric poem the infinite possibilities of the poetic language are exploited to the maximum degree in that there is no space for redundancy, and the intertextual space tends to be wider and wider. Ambiguity, in its general meaning, characterizes all poetry. In the preface to the second edition of Seven Types of Ambiguity written in 1947, Empson felt obliged to answer the question "... is all good poetry supposed to be ambiguous?" (*ibidem*:16), and answered:

I think that it is; but I am ready to believe that the methods I was developing would often be irrelevant to the demonstration. As I understand it, there is always in great poetry a feeling of generalization from a case which has been presented definitely; there is always an appeal to a background of human experience which is all the more present when it cannot be named. I do not have to deny that the narrower chisel may cut deeply into the heart. What I would suppose is that, whenever a receiver of poetry is seriously

moved by an apparently simple line, what are moving in him are the traces of a great part of his past experience and of the structure of his past judgements. Considering what it feels like to take real pleasure in verse, I should think it surprising, and on the whole, rather disagreeable, if even the most searching criticism of such lines of verse could find nothing whatever in their implications to be the cause of so straddling a commotion and so broad a calm (ibidem:16).

Empson felt he had not demonstrated that all good poetry is , in fact, ambiguous, but he certainly believed that it was. And ambiguity in its stricter sense, I think, is also a feature of a lot of good poetry, and in particular of XXth century American poetry. Why XXth century American poetry? I will try to answer this question by taking a quick look at the development of American poetry as it progressively became autonomous and self-reliant, by getting rid of its dependence upon the previous century - in terms of time - and upon Europe - in terms of space.

In his discussion of the seventh type of ambiguity, Empson calls on Freud's authority to explain why the early Egyptians had the same sign for 'young' and 'old' with an added hieroglyphic

translated into a gesture in the spoken language. He reports that they ' only gradually learnt to separate the two sides of the antithesis and think of the one without conscious comparison with the other' (ibidem:227) . There was no antithesis for the early Egyptians between old age and infancy, because there was no conflict between the two ages. As the language became more civilized, the Egyptians had to learn to discriminate, to distinguish between the ages, but they did so as they felt the need for

expressing a conflict between two related concepts. Empson concludes that, if two things are opposite, there must be a relation which connects them and uses this ground as a basis for his last type of ambiguity, "that of full contradiction, marking a division in the author's mind" (ibidem:6) . I think that what happened for Egyptians as they progressed towards civilization might have happened for poetry as it came out of the twilight that characterized the last decade of the XIXth century and the first decade of the XXth century. American poetry, as distinguished from English poetry, was associated with the idea of making a fresh start, ever since there had been any American poetry. The American poet who felt the conflicting forces at large in America as opposed to the forces in Europe came to realize the relations connecting the two worlds more and more in terms of morality, and consciously realized that if he wanted a moral world to suit his needs he had to construct it for himself and upon his own experiments, successes or failures that might lead him to a final resolution. The poetic language evolved gradually from a feeling of conflict Europe-America to a feeling of anxiety or crisis with regard to the ^{between the two worlds. The American poet had to stress links and relations} relations with the old world rather than merely the conflicting forces; out of this attitude a poetry sprang which was universal, not regional, which could encompass old feelings and new feelings, which had to be based on universal truths or universal lies, which had to be made out of intratextual as well as intertextual elements, which could speak of the way of making poetry in America by relation to all cultures, new as well

as old, on this side of the globe as well as on the other side of the globe; a poetry whose forces were not to be antithetical to other forces, but a poetry where all possible relations, scientific or perceptual, had to be taken into account. And lyric poetry, not being limited by the demands of a people - as epic poetry is - and not being constrained within the actual taking place of events - as dramatic poetry is - but relying only upon its own effusion, yet being limited by a structural rigour, is the genre which most satisfies the quest for contraction and condensation in the expression of universal matters by means of poetic language.

Twentieth Century Poetry and Reader-Response Criticism

Poetry in the XXth century is apprehended by the heir of the Romantic tradition, the XXth century poet, as a force able to control a world of confusion, chaos, disorder, and ; passionate feelings by means of the objectification of emotions. In T.S.Eliot's words (1) the XXth century poet started out not as a man, or superman, expressing the emotional reality of his inner self, but expressing

a new thing resulting from the concentration of a very great number of experiences; ... [because] poetry is not a turning loose of emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality (ibidem:42-43).

With Eliot the poem's life and the poet's life are neatly separated, and the poem becomes the ideal place where conditions of harmony and equilibrium can be finally reached.

From the formalist point of view, the poem, far from being the meeting-ground for the gathering, struggling, and final balancing of different emotions, became an end at which men aim, something with an intrinsic meaning superior to anything human, superior even to nature; the poem was an image of perception that the critic had to clarify and explain by describing the poetic structures of the work achieved through the manipulation of the linguistic means available. This conception led to the idea that the poem had to be defined as an object of knowledge, with regard to which the critical

mind had to work to discover how it could be interpreted. So, while the critical mind was at work to find out what the poem meant, poetry was there - and the poems were there - as objects to be approached and explained. All this took place in the classroom within the institutionalized system of teacher-centered explanations and explications. Among the great number of theoretical positions adopted by contemporary critics in the field of reader-response criticism Stanley Fish stands out as one of the major attackers of Wimsatt and Beardsley's essay on the "Affective Fallacy" (2), where one can read a statement like the following:

The Affective Fallacy is a confusion between the poem and its results (what is it and what it does) ... trying to derive the standards of criticism from the philosophical effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome ... is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgement, tends to disappear (ibidem:21).

Fish's essay, "Literature in the Reader : Affective Stylistics", can be regarded as the strongest claimant of the reader's activity as "identical with " the ~~txt~~ text, and, therefore, as the defensor of the belief that what the poem is is what the poem does.

Personal responses to literature in the process of text analysis carried out in the classroom or privately, as one's personal experience, become legitimized. There is no definite authority on any piece of literature, but there are reading responses which do not create the meaning but contribute to

making meaning. Reader-responses as such are never ultimate, but are open to change; they do not imprison a text within a definite interpretation, but leave the set of assumptions free either to change or to be enriched with more meanings, whether in line with other pre-established ones, or not in line with those at all. It goes without saying that not all interpretations are possible, since any interpretation must be aware of itself as a function of the reader's consciousness. When a reader has to cope with an ambiguous text, his response to the text could not be that of choosing between two meanings, as much as it would be the experiencing of ambiguity in itself that would make up the response, the mode of reading of the poem, the meaning.

Ambiguity, as an inherent feature of a text, is, in Empson's introductory words, any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language (*ibidem*:19); ambiguity, as an experience, is the result of the reader's ability to act with and upon the text. A quotation from the last poem (in prose) of John Ashbery's Three Poems (3) is perhaps useful to illustrate how the concept of ambiguity can work through one's mind in the reading process. Towards the end of the last poem, the one in which he balances the themes of the previous two poems with facts of his own life, Ashbery writes:

... dusk began to invade my room. Soon the outlines
of things began to grow blurred and I continued to think
along well-rehearsed lines like something out of the past.

Was there really nothing new under the sun? Or was this novelty - the ability to take up these tattered enigmas again and play with them until something like a solution emerged from them, only to grow dim at once and fade like an ignis fatuus, a specter mocking the very reality it had so convincingly assumed? (ibidem : 116-117)

The conveying of ambiguity in the passage not as something told but as something experienced lies, I think, in the way of apprehending, on the part of the reader, the question : Or was this novelty - ...? This could be either an anaphoric pro-form, or a cataphoric pro-form, or even an adjectival form. The fact that what follows the dash, immediately followed by a question mark, rules out the possibility for this to be taken as an adjectival form does not prevent one from considering it as such, on first reading the passage, expecting a predication to occur perhaps just before the question mark. A cataphoric use of this would imply that it should stand for

[that the outlines of things began to grow blurred and
that I continued to think along well-rehearsed lines
like something out of the past]

or for part of it; or for :

[that there was really nothing new under the sun]
while an anaphoric use of this would imply that it should stand for the material following the dash. Actually, upon re-reading the whole passage, one comes to realize^{that} that the "I" continued to think along well-rehearsed lines simply is not true: indeed

the "I" acquires a new ability, that of finding not one single solution to the enigmas of life, but several different solutions, never final, but characterizing a man's way of apprehending reality. It is a rhetorical way of putting it: the poet might have thought that what he was experiencing was an old perception, but indeed there cannot be two identical perceptions and, similarly, there cannot be two identical ways of perceiving poetry on the part of the reader. What Ashbery is doing here is constructing a way of perceiving his own private world as he is perceiving it: the writer, in fact, as the painter, creates the illusion of another reality in the addressee and makes him forget his own reality. As the painter, in the process of painting, takes two or three steps backwards and puts himself in the position of the beholder to look at his work from a distance and in the right light, thus becoming, in that moment, the observer, so the writer writes thinking about his reader, building up his reader. The world within which the poet moves is a "convex" world (see Ashbery's 'Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror') that suggests - as B. Costello points out (1982), "the perfection of the sphere" but "also causes a distortion in what it reflects" (ibidem:505). This distortion is the aesthetic dimension which proclaims the work of art superior to the natural world and which establishes the communion artist/addressee. Towards the end of Three Poems the "I" experiences the changes taking place in his destiny, by perceiving

the beams and girders defining the limits of the
ambiguous situation one had come to know and even to tolerate,
if not to love (ibidem : 117).

and the reader in the text responds to the "ambiguous situation" by knowing it, by tolerating it, and even by loving it. It is the situation which is a specter and which is able to mould itself; yet the situation only exists because there is somebody to experience it. In the last lines the poet conceives of a final image :

A vast wetness as of sea and air combined, a single smooth, anonymous matrix ... after the last spectator had gone home to sleep (ibidem : 118).

If the poet's situation is, metaphorically, the text, the spectator going home to sleep undergoes an experience which is similar to that of the reader closing the book. Something remains, an anonymous matrix, that is the totality of all possible experiences contained, potentially, in the text. The reader closes the book, the spectator goes home to sleep; the ambiguity, once it has been experienced, remains. Though ambiguous, the situation has created a social bond between people and has, therefore, acquired a social value.

Metaphor and Meta-text

It can be easily seen that the two words, metaphor and meta-text, have a part of their linguistic roots in common, namely meta, the equivalent of "beyond". In the case of metaphor it is something - namely, the meaning - that is "brought (from the Latin word fero) beyond"; in the case of meta-text, the notion is that of a text "beyond" the text in question. Max Black⁽⁴⁾ in Models and Metaphors , gives an exhaustive account of the use of metaphor as obeying the "substitution view", the "comparison view" and, finally, the "interaction view". The first two uses of metaphor are related to the pleasure the reader feels - or should feel - in being faced with an unexpected exploitation of the language, that is, either placing the literal meaning behind another concealed, "metaphorical", one, or supplying a likeness to present some kind of meaning. But, taken in this way, metaphor would be nothing but a mechanical artifice, the construction of a figure of speech, that the reader would discover by means of some function applied to it, a process that would keep him busy and delight him. But Max Black is looking for the philosophical use of metaphors, which he finds in the "interaction view". He conceives of a system of associated commonplaces (ibidem:40) that one should possess in order to interpret a metaphor. The interpretation of a metaphor, in fact, depends not on the truth of commonplaces, but on their ability to be readily evoked by

the reader. In order to understand the statement "Man is a wolf" (Max Black's example), the reader should share the ideas of the maker of the metaphor, true or untrue, as they might be. Reader and author, in fact, should have in their minds the same system of related commonplaces, which is evoked when a metaphor is established. On the basis of the system, certain features are suppressed or not taken into account, whereas other features are given emphasis, to let the metaphorical pattern stick out. This is all fine when a common knowledge, or common cultural codes, are shared by addresser and addressee. What happens in poetry? Max Black does take poetry into consideration:

But in a poem, or a piece of sustained prose, the writer can establish a novel pattern of implications for the literal use of the key expressions, prior to using them as vehicles for his metaphors. ... Metaphors can be supported by specially constructed systems of implications, as well as by accepted commonplaces; they can be made to measure and need not be reach-me-downs. (ibidem:43)

All this is "interaction", which differs from "substitution" or "comparison" in that it basically organizes meaning and does not simply transfer it upon some other concept; it does so by forcing the reader into making choices and taking decisions as well, and, in addition to this, it may contain - and often, in ambiguous texts, it does contain - traps for the reader to discover and use in his deconstruction and reconstruction of the text. With regard to "interaction metaphors" Max Black adds:

Their mode of operation requires the reader to use a system of implications (a system of "commonplaces" - or a special system established for the ~~purpose~~ purpose in hand) as a means for selecting, emphasizing, and organizing relations in a different field. This use of a "subsidiary subject" is a distinctive intellectual operation (though one familiar enough through our experiences of learning anything whatever), demanding simultaneous awareness of both subjects but not reducible to any comparison between the two. (ibidem:46)

The "system of commonplaces" is, in the analysis of a meta-text, just a metaphor for the system of background knowledge and intertextual competence, since one realizes that there is hardly such thing as "commonplace" when one comes into contact with poetry. But once the cognitive element of the text is apprehended by the reader who can mould it into the shape of a "text beyond", then this content becomes a "commonplace" of addresser and addressee alike, who, through their interaction, have arrived at it.

Conclusion

Although I do not intend to draw any general conclusions about the use of ambiguity in literature, since it has been my main objective to focus upon the ambiguous features of ten XXth century American lyric poems as representative of the creative individuality of the poets who wrote them, nonetheless I think that there is a common ground upon which these poems have been erected, not as monumental works intended to celebrate the identity of a nation, or justify its existence, or even illustrate its anxieties, but as works done by people - poets - who were able to exploit the potentialities of a common available resource - the American language - in relation to their own experience as writers who wanted to compose poems that could exist thereafter as witness to a mode of making a poetic text, and ultimately, to a mode of making poetry. From the preoccupation of escaping from personality to the need of using language as a basis for identity, that is, historically, from the beginning of the century up to the threshold of post-modern poetry, these poems share a preoccupation with poetic form as a device for self-definition and are, each according to an internal system or order rather than according to pre-codified rules, instances of humanity, of temporal flowing, of life situations to be perceived and processed by the reader. The ambiguity of these poems functions, as I hope I have shown, in the reader - in that it

conveys the dynamic process going on in the reader's mind during the act of reading itself; it functions through the reader - in that it conveys the author's mode of constructing his model reader, by means of the strategical weapons he possesses, from persuasion to the setting up of a trap; finally, it is made functional by the reader, in the phase of re-building up of the text which follows the deconstructive work. From its role as a passive feature characterizing the text, ambiguity gradually acquires a status as a function of the author's strategies, and an active protagonist of the text as such after the process of re-construction of the text has undergone the reader's mind.

The lyric poem that is definable as meta-text is the locus in which the function of ambiguity, such as I have considered it, is most characteristic. In considering how striking the ambiguous features of American XXth century lyric poetry are, however, I have become more and more aware that the role of ambiguity in specific areas of research - still within the literary/linguistic domain - has, more often than not, a lot in common with the way ambiguity functions in poetry, in making a text a discourse on discourse.

As far as the study of authorial variants is concerned, for instance, it is vital to see how different ways of perceiving a variant work outside the text, a thing which would lead to a different stylistic evaluation of the work but also to a possibly different way of "organizing" the text. Similarly in translation it is not only the amount of information that is to be transferred into the new language-code but also, and above all, the re-

creation of an environment suitable to the arising of certain responses as well as the system of related commonplaces. If the overall effect of a literary work consists of the capability exhibited by the text to generate ever new readings, then, through the choosing of a variant or of a particular expression in translation, the same effect should be achieved and realized in the mind of a potential reader.

One may think, at this point, that since ambiguity works in a certain way in poetry, and since a similar way of working is also, to a certain extent, a property of ambiguity in a translated work, one may think that I am maintaining that ambiguity works, in more or less the same way, throughout the literary product. But there is a basic difference, apart from all the differences that one could actually find between prose and poetry (since this is the difference that interests me here, and I am not going into details as regards the differences between, for instance, the novel and the short story, or fiction and drama); the difference is in the author's attitude towards his subject-matter. When a prose-writer sets out to produce something, he needs to build up a world, a possible world, equipped with a certain amount of details. The details can undergo a process of change during the writing process and the 'story' itself may even change. But the writer has been confronted with the problem of 'how' to construct a world, and then he goes on to express it. What happens in poetry is the opposite: the writer needs words, language, textual material, and he can construct a world employing only that. So when ambiguity comes to play a role in this kind

of text there are no pre-set conceptions deriving from the knowledge of the 'possible world' - as is the case, for instance, with built-in or pre-conceived possible worlds where events take place according to a pre-codified structure. When ambiguity plays a role in poetry, it moves about in a verbal world, where things and events are no protagonists, where the only protagonist is language itself. Even if something is real, once it is used in a poem, it becomes a purely intra-textual reality; it does not exist outside the text itself. In poetry it is not only how ambiguity is used that matters, but also how ambiguity empowers the text with abstract, theoretical, philosophical meaning: it is in poetry - which is the most abstract expression of language - that ordinary language and ideal language come to a conflict, engendering all sorts of verbal and psychological experiences in the reader's mind.

NOTES : Part 1

- (1) I use the word sentence here as constituent of discourse; I refer to the same as 'utterance' when it is contextualized.
- (2) For non-verbal codes, such as facial expressions, gestures, etc., see Smith (1966).
- (3) The term ideational occurs in the paper "The Form of a Functional Grammar" (in Kress. 1976: 7-25); it was then changed into experiential in "Functions and Universals of Language" (in Kress. 1976: 26-31). In Language as Social Semiotic the heading ideational combines the first two components - the logical and the experiential - which are closely related (Halliday: 1978).
- (4) For a philosophical discussion of coherence and truth, see Rescher (1973).
Whether it have a communicative function or an expressive function, language must be organized systemically. We may convincingly argue that there are formal constraints depending on the lexico-grammatical system, the phonological system, and the semantic system to which language is tied. But one cannot predict pragmatic conditions, that is 'how' a piece of language will be used. If the use of a discourse is appropriate to the situation, then communication is reached.
- (5) Throughout my paper, I will consider poetry as a written message; if I deal with poetry as oral message, I will say so.
- (6) saving is not included, since it is the only lexical occurrence of the line.
- (7) Benedetto Croce, in putting forward the distinction between prosaic language and poetic language, affirms that only the 'poetic expression' is the word; that poetry is language in its genuine meaning, that it is the mother tongue of mankind (Croce 1980: 20). It is significant that the Italian philosopher, who relates all manifestations of art to the abstract intuitive and preexistent notion of Beauty, professes the hypothesis of poetry as explicatory of the nature of language.

- (8) I am using the word ambiguity here in a general sense; being it the key concept of this paper, I will go back to it, to discuss it extensively.
- (9) Evidence of this sort of hypothesis - formation is supplied by G.L.Dillon in Language Processing and the Reading of Literature (1978).
- (10) For an extensive reading of the role of the addressee, see: Fish (1970-71: 123-162), Iser (1974), Riffaterre (1978), Eco (1979).
- (11) For the theory of 'speech acts' see Austin (1962) and Searle (1969)
- (12) M.Riffaterre interprets the stylistic context as a linguistic pattern suddenly broken by an element which was unpredictable, and the contrast resulting from this interference is the stylistic stimulus (in Chatman and Levin 1967: 427). This idea has been the point of departure for a detailed account of it as microcontext (constituents which remain unmarked versus constituents in relation to which the reader perceives a degree of unpredictability) and macrocontext (part of the literary message which precedes the stylistic device, and which is exterior to it) (in Chatman and Levin 1967: 431-441, passim). The function of the latter is that of reinforcing the stylistic effect of the device, and of amplifying the contrast established by the microcontext (ibidem:438). There are two forms of this function: one is that of providing a context for the stylistic device which is stylistically unmarked, so that the stylistic device is foregrounded; the other is that of prefiguring one of the immediate constituents of the stylistic device by means of an anticipatory element, so that there is an immediate contact between the stylistic device and what precedes it. In both contexts (the one which creates the opposition constituting the SD, and the one which modifies this opposition by reinforcing or weakening it (ibidem: 432)) there is the active presence of the reader, who perceives the continuity of the pattern. Stanley Fish finds it interesting that Riffaterre locates the disrupted pattern in the context rather than in any pre-existing and exterior norm (Fish, 1970-1: 156), and that the attention is shifted from the object to the reader, but cannot accept the idea itself of stylistic device. As a matter of fact, he writes:
No fixed and artificial inventory of stylistic devices is possible, since in terms of contextual norms anything

22

can be a stylistic device. The temporal flow of the reading experience is central and even controlling; it literally locates, with the help of the reader, the objects of analysis. The view of language and of comprehension is non-static; the context and SDs are moving and shifting; the reader is moving with them and through his responses, creating them, and the critic is moving too, placing his analytic apparatus now here, now there. (*ibidem*:156-157)

- (13) Blake's dark, satanic mills are not yet the mills of industrial Britain, although the reader may - and does - create this association in his mind. Also the poems of the Scottish poet William McGonagall can be mentioned, as compositions written with one purpose (the celebration of well-known people) and having achieved a different one (make the reader laugh at them).
- (14) G. Hough (1978) points out the difference between a real illocutionary act, and the mimesis of an illocutionary act, quoting passages from Austin's How to Do Things with Words (1962) to support his views. He explains:
"Go and catch a falling star" is not really a command, only the imitation of a command. (Hough 1978: 28)
He considers the intercourse between intended meaning and achieved meaning - between the command and the imitation of the command - an eight type of ambiguity.
- (15) Umberto Eco gives an example in analysing "Un drame bien parisien", by Alphonse Allais; but in this text the textuality (as opposed to the meta-textuality) is reduced; actually, the reader is fooled by the author, and the text asserts itself as meta-text (Eco 1979:194-218).
- (16) at the University of Edinburgh, in the year 1977/78.
- (17) Mukařovský, in his Word and the Verbal Art, writes:
the question of truthfulness does not make any sense in poetry, where the aesthetic function prevails.
Here the utterance "means" not only that reality which comprises its immediate theme but the set of all realities, the universe as a whole, or - more precisely - the entire existential experience of the author, or, better, of the perceiver. (Mukařovský 1977:6)

of experiences are activated in our mind, Fillmore argues, one understands - and associates - the expressions foregrounded according to the 'saliency hierarchy', and this explains his slogan, meanings are relativized to scenes (*ibidem* : 59).

- (21) want is considered here as a modal verb (as in Jackendoff 1972). Some authors consider it 'marginal' (Strang 1962) or 'not formally a modal' (Palmer 1979).

NOTES : Part 2

- (1) in Ezra Pound. His Metric and Poetry (Chicago 1917),
rep. in To Criticize the Critic, London, 1965 :28.
- (2) The symbols used are those of the international phonetic transcription (according to the principles of the International Phonetic Association - IPA).
- (3) 'Excerpts from a Critical Sketch: A Draft of Thirty Cantos by E. Pound' (1931), rep. in Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams, New York, 1954.
- (4) rep. in Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays.
The Horizon Press: 1968.
- (5) E.H.Gombrich, The Story of Art, London 1950; Italian translation: La Storia dell'arte raccontata da E.H.Gombrich.
Torino, 1966: 572-575, passim: the Italian translation is the only one available to me at the moment.
- (6) B. Rose, American Art Since 1900: A Critical History.
London and New York, 1967.
- (7) In his Text and Context. Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse (London and New York, 1977),
Teun van Dijk formalizes this concept, by expressing the relation

$$w_i \quad , \quad t_i$$
 where w_i is an element of a set of possible worlds (w),
and t_i the time at which the situation is taking place (30).

- (8) In other poems of the collection Lowell addresses himself explicitly to his wife; presumably, the addressee here is Lowell's wife.
- (9) This relation introduced by but is discussed in Halliday 1976 : 250.

NOTES : Part 3

- (1) T.S.Eliot "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in Selected Prose of T.S.Eliot, New York: 1975.
- (2) W.Wimsatt, jr., and M.Beardsley, The Verbal Icon; Studies in the Meaning of Poetry, Lexington :1954.
- (3) J.Ashbery, Three Poems, Penguin 1970.
- (4) M.Black, Models and Metaphors, Ithaca:1962.

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